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ESPIONAGE

MAGAZINE

February 1985

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Editorial

We're on a roll!

While we had to work very hard to get stories for our first issue: telling people what we were up to, then waiting for them to write spy short-stories — not an item even prolific writers generally have lying about the house — and finally picking the best from those that arrived in our office (including making one last-minute, the-day-before-going-to-the-printer change), we have had a much easier time getting this current issue collected and readied for publication. And our next two issues are just sitting luxuriously on my desk, patiently awaiting editing and printing.

We have the Mystery Writers of America club to thank for all of the above! Their members have filled ninety percent of our pages thus far, and we are enormously appreciative. We feel as if we have the best writers available. No, we know we do! We trust that you are enjoying these same writers as much as we.

Frankly, editor-to-reader, when you read a story once for acceptance, a second time to edit it, a third time to proof your editing, a fourth time to proof it in type and then, finally, a fifth time to proof it just before it goes to the printer — well, if that story still pleases you (in this case, me — and it surely does!), then you know it's a good one. I know that this issue is loaded with good ones. I know, also, that you're going to like them all, too.

Well. . . given individual tastes, perhaps you'll only like most of them. But I don't mind pleasing most of the people most of the time!

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ESPIONAGE MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 1985

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PENSION PLAN

by Dan J. Marlowe

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Lyudin was awake in his hotel room before his 7:00 A.M. wake-up call. He dressed carefully: white shirt, conservative tie, three-piece suit, well-shined shoes. He always tried to look like a businessman, when on assignment.

It was only in the movies that agents wore black jumpsuits and black sneakers. A business suit enabled Lyudin to blend in anywhere after a job, even if something went wrong. It could be a busy street, a quiet restaurant, a hotel bar. Once it had been a wedding reception.

He rechecked the contents of his oversized briefcase when he was ready to leave the room. It contained a rolled-up telephone repairman's leather waist-belt with pouched tool-pockets which, when full, would contain various-sized screwdrivers, needle-nosed pliers, wirecutters, files, even a miniature soldering iron. The briefcase also held a three-ounce vial of ether, a syringe with a tiny injection unit, a roll of colorless Scotch tape, and a small Polaroid camera.

Lyudin was a stocky man with average good looks and an average build. Although in his middle thirties, he seemed younger, due to a rigorously-maintained fitness program. There was nothing outstanding about his appearance, a characteristic he shared with all the top men in his profession.

He went down to the lobby, shook off the doorman's choice of a cab, and selected his own. He rode to within a block of the gray, six-story office building across the street from the Platzdammer Museum, then walked the rest of the way.

He had timed his arrival to coincide with the morning influx of office workers. The guards would be casual about their jobs until the employee-rush died down. Those entering the building later could be presumed to have business there and be the subject of questioning by the guards.

He passed a guard-desk and reached an elevator, unchallenged. He exited at the fifth floor and walked confidently along the tiled corridor until he came to a recessed niche in the array of frosted glass doors. The niche contained a single wooden door labeled UTILITY ROOM.

The door was locked, but the lock yielded quickly to the pick removed from Lyudin's breast pocket. He was inside the closet-sized room, with the door closed behind him, in less than a moment. The week before, he had completed his

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customarily thorough job of casing the building; in particular, the adjacent office, which was his target.

He removed jacket, vest, and tie, and hung them up on a hook. He rolled up his shirtsleeves, then took the repairman's belt from his briefcase. He cinched it aslant around his waist, in the style affected by all repairmen who had seen American western movies. It took only another moment to load the articles of his trade into the belt's pockets. The vial of ether, the syringe, and the Scotch tape he placed in his shirt pocket.

He left the utility room and stationed himself in the corridor, alongside the nearby office door. He had checked the interior of the target office during the previous day's lunch hour. When he recognized the man approaching the office, from his picture, Lyudin stepped forward.

"Telephone check-up, Comrade," he said. He held out his wallet, negligently opened to forged identification good enough to have fooled a genuine telephone company employee.

The man barely glanced at the identification. What the man really saw was the telephone repairman's tool-belt.

"Tell my secretary I'll be in the cafeteria," he said, unlocking the door.

"Surely," Lyudin promised. The secretary was the second half of his prey. He entered the office, reflecting that there were more comrades addressed as such outside Russia these days than within. It was considered a touch old-fashioned.

The office was conveniently small, as he had noted during his first visit. He had estimated its dimensions with an expert eye, deciding at once that the assignment could be completed successfully without the use of anything as crass as firearms.

He spread a handful of tools upon the secretary's desk, in case the woman walked in before he finished. He removed the light bulb from her desk lamp and delicately abraded one side of it with a fine-grained mini-rasp, until a tiny hole appeared.

Working smoothly, Lyudin drew ether into the syringe, inserted its needle-tip into the hole in the bulb, and carefully injected an ounce and a half of ether. He made sure the level of the ether didn't reach the bulb's filaments. He replaced the bulb, after sealing the hole with a small strip of the colorless Scotch tape.

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He replaced his tools in the belt-pockets, checked to make sure everything was in order, and left the office. The man he had spoken to previously was coming along the corridor, with a dark-haired woman beside him. Lyudin recognized her, too, from her picture.

He returned unhurriedly to the utility room, after making sure the pair entered the office. He checked his watch twice while he waited. Three and a half minutes elapsed before he felt as well as heard a soft, dull-sounding WHUUMP! from the office next door. No one unprepared for it would have noticed anything at all.

Lyudin knew that the light bulb had exploded when the secretary switched on her desk lamp. Far more serious than the immediate blinding flash was the almost instantaneous removal of 98% of the oxygen in the small office. It was an effect compounded by the oxygen's replacement by the exploded ether's poisonous vapor.

He put on his tie, vest, and jacket again, after repacking his briefcase. He carried the briefcase from the utility room. At the office door, he saw at once that its knob was slowly turning. He placed himself with his back to the door, gripping the knob tightly. His body shielded his action from stray passers-by. One of the pair inside had known enough to head for the door.

The feeble door-opening effort lasted less than fifteen seconds. When the corridor was empty, Lyudin opened the door and moved it backward and forward a few times to send fresh air inside. He found the woman in a heap upon the floor. The man had never made it away from his desk.

He closed the door, removed the Polaroid from the briefcase, and took facial shots of each. He waited for the pictures to develop to be sure he had what he needed before he replaced the camera in the briefcase. Both pictures were clear and definite.

He glanced from the Polaroid shot of the woman to her body on the floor. Something appeared out of perspective. Lyudin frowned, then bent down for a closer inspection. He realized at once that the disproportion was a wig that had gone askew. His trained eye studied the dead face again, assessing it without the wig.

Suddenly disquieted, he knelt and removed the wig. His lips tightened. He crouched beside the body, the removed wig in his hand. The secretary with her boss in the office

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building was no longer an unknown assignment. He had known her as Valyrea Levitzsky.

Little Valyrea.

She had worked with him in the past, and not as a secretary. She had been a fellow agent; quiet, unobtrusive, intelligent, and fun-loving. Her presence had lightened many a long day.

Lyudin replaced the wig with difficulty and an unaccustomed sense of squeamishness. He looked around the office again for incriminating signs of his presence, and finding none, stood momentarily with his handkerchief-wrapped hand upon the doorknob.

He looked down again at the already blanched features of the dead woman, then shook his head slowly.

Little Valyrea.

Alexei Davydov, Lyudin's boss, had sent Lyudin on this assignment. When Lyudin was ready, the man named Alexei Davydov was going to regret it.

Lyudin left the office and the building quickly.

Natasha rose from her chair at the sound of the telephone's ring. She was a dark, solidly-plump woman, with a serene expression "Yes?" she said.

"Madame Lyudin?"

"It is so." Outside, late afternoon sunlight dappled the thin leaves of the beech trees around the dacha in Sochi.

"Hello, darling," a familiar baritone said in her ear.

She barely restrained herself from calling his name. She cleared her throat. "Is everything alright?" She couldn't keep the anxiety from her voice.

"Irina and the children are coming for a visit."

"That's marvelous!" Natasha exclaimed. "We always have such a good time together."

"I thought I should give you time to remove the mice from the traps."

"That's thoughtful of you, dear. As usual."

"Take the list from the bottom drawer of my desk and implement it in the time frame indicated. And when you and Irina and the children come to the city, use the papers you will find with the list."

Natasha hesitated. "Is this a...a dislocation?"

"Permanently so." The voice in her ear was brisk-sounding. "Leave everything. Walk away. Understood?"

"Understood," she repeated, in a faint tone. She hung up when the line hummed distantly in her ear. Her face was troubled-looking as she hurried to Lyudin's desk.

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Irina paused in the middle of hanging damp clothes in the side yard, and trotted toward the ringing telephone inside the small, neat-looking house. She was a tall blonde, with a model's grace but none of a model's emaciated look. "Yes?" she said.

"Madame Lyudin?"

"Yes."

"Hello, darling," a deep voice said.

Her breath caught. "Is...is everything alright?"

"You are receiving an invitation to visit."

"How nice!" she said, promptly.

"Take nothing. Before you leave, mail the small package marked Kagansky. It is sealed, wrapped, and addressed."

"I will do so."

"Good. I'll see you soon."

Irina hung up the phone slowly when the disconnect sounded. She went outside again and resumed her clothes-hanging, then wondered why she was bothering. *Take nothing,* Lyudin had said.

She looked around her at the no-longer-used sandbox and the tattered tire-swing. She knew that the time left to her to gaze upon familiar objects could be measured in hours, and that the house in Kotze, the small fishing village twenty miles west of Murmansk, would soon be a memory.

It was a measure of their displeasure with him, Lyudin reflected, that the car sent to the airport to bring him to the Office of State Security was an old Zis sedan. Why waste upon Lyudin an official limousine? He smiled wryly as he climbed into the battered vehicle.

There had been a snowstorm that morning, and the Moscow sky was a dull gray. Though the ride from the airport was a short one, Lyudin took the time to notice. The security checks began at the gate of the KGB building. Inside, the color of the walls in the long corridors had changed from buff to light blue during the half-dozen years since he had been there. He had always been peculiarly sensitive to the appearances of things. A room seen after ten years, with a chair in a different corner, struck an instant jarring note.

The accompanying guide showed Lyudin's badge, which had been sent to the front desk, to a succession of guards at corridor checkpoints as they moved deeper into the building's interior. He had an occasional glimpse through partly-opened doors of desk-

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bound personnel at work at whatever it was they did. They looked so young. Surely the majority of them must have been at the academy when Lyudin entered the apparat.

The escort-guard tapped lightly upon an unmarked door. He opened it and stood aside for Lyudin to enter. It was a large office. Lyudin nodded to a stout, balding man, with protruding lips, who looked up from a sheaf of papers on his desk. The escort was waved outside by the balding man, Alexei Davydov.

Lyudin settled leisurely into the single chair beside Davydov's desk, when the door closed behind the escort. Lyudin remained silent, forcing Davydov to speak first. "You know we don't like you coming here," Davydov said, finally. He spoke in the thick, half-muffled accent of the Ukraine.

"You fought it off with admirable vigor," Lyudin agreed. He was looking around the office. "You've come up in the world since you began at the Petrovka Street branch, Comrade. Is that a mahogany desk?" He pointed at a second door. "And a private washroom? Kagansky told me you were doing well among the local ladder-climbers, but I hadn't envisioned this grandeur."

"What's so important it required you to come here?" Davydov demanded, impervious to distraction.

"A change in the game plan. A new game, actually."

"I hadn't heard about it," Davydov said, brusquely.

"You're the first to know," Lyudin assured him. "I'm packing it in. *Finis la guerre.*"

Alexei Davydov smothered a quick retort. He leaned back in his swivel chair, a slight film glazing his thyroid-prominent eyeballs. Within the agency, it was considered a better indication of storm warnings than the national meteorological forecast.

"Isn't this rather sudden, Lyudin?" Davydov's eyes flicked downward at the papers on his desk as though begrudging even a moment away from them. "You're too young to retire."

"There are no young men in my line of work," Lyudin disagreed.

Davydov made an impatient gesture. "Think it over." His manner was as abrupt as his tone.

It was the reaction Lyudin had expected but it still annoyed him. Control was what they wouldn't willingly release. Control, with its accompanying feeling of power. He tried to

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keep his voice mild-sounding. "Krimsky retired from this department. Evenki retired."

"They didn't retire from this section."

"You're saying there's no retirement from this section?"

"I'm saying — " Davydov paused.

"You're saying that it hasn't come up before, because I'm the first to survive long enough to apply for retirement?"

Davydov had recovered from his momentary stumble. "I'd advise you not to become difficult," he said, coldly. "You're aware of the section's special circumstances. You're — "

"I'm leaving." Luyden cut him off.

"You're not!" Davydov hitched himself forward in his chair. He looked and sounded exasperated. "You wouldn't last a month without the backing of the apparat. Do you think you can hide?"

"I'm planning on it," Lyudin said. He was looking at the single large landscape on the wall behind Davydov's desk.

Davydov shook a dark-colored cigarette free from a crumpled pack on his desk. Lyudin noticed that the hand that lighted it trembled slightly. "There's a reason you selected this exact moment for your announcement?" Davydov asked.

"Indeed. There was the matter of Valyrea."

"I told them you'd recognize her." The corners of his hard-looking mouth curved upward in a facsimile of a smile. "Although not in time, eh, Comrade? The Group didn't seem to feel it mattered if you recognized her. But now your thinking currently runs that we might have in mind the same eventual disposition for you?"

"A variation, possibly."

"You've always known that some distasteful things were necessary for the good of the apparat."

"Up to the point of setting us at each other."

"Valyrea Levitzsky was given an assignment and then fell in love with the man she was monitoring." Davydov was choosing his words carefully. "We didn't know what she had told him. They both had to go. Since women can disappear much more easily than men, and are much harder to locate, it became necessary to intervene with dispatch."

"But not via me."

"The computer kicked your name out."

"Then it can damn well kick it out permanently!"

Davydov considered the tip of his cigarette, obviously at-

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tempting to restrain himself. "I'm trying to be patient with you, Lyudin. How are you planning on financing this sudden retirement? You have expensive tastes. We knew you needed women when you were still at the academy. A wife and children in Sochi; a wife and children in Kotze. It takes rubles. Some people thought your arrangement old-fashioned. A few thought it extravagant. But we financed it."

"For value received, Comrade." For the first time there was an edge in Lyudin's tone. "I'm not a sunshine patriot. Nor a summertime soldier. I'm entitled."

Davydov's eyes were slits as smoke curled upward into them. "You're avoiding the issue," he replied. "How are you going to finance this retirement?"

"There's always my pension."

Davydov waved a dismissing hand. "It wouldn't be nearly enough. If there were one."

"You feel there's some doubt about it?"

"The circumstances of your withdrawal would of course have to be evaluated." Davydov stopped. Lyudin's expression hadn't changed, but Davydov's sixth sense was obviously experiencing a vibration. "It wouldn't be my decision, of course," he added, quickly. "But I still don't see how — " he stopped again and shrugged.

"I know you don't see." Lyudin said it quietly. "But it's really rather simple. When I found Anatoly Kagansky a year ago, he told me about the money you keep in this office. The unofficial boodle. The golden spigot."

"Your report said Kagansky was dead when you found him!" Davydov blurted.

"My report said that? My, errors creep in, don't they? No. Kagansky was only eighty-five percent dead when I found him. And because he was dying unpleasantly, he was...ahh...vindictive. He told me, in particular, that if you had turned on the golden spigot when ordered to do so by your superiors, he wouldn't have had to die by inches."

Davydov's eyes had shifted focus. "Some field agents can't be trusted with money," he mumbled.

"So you sit in your chair here and let agents in the field die for lack of promised bribes? Bribes approved by the Group?" Lyudin held up his hand when Davydov would have said something. "The bottom line, Comrade, is that I vowed to the slowly dying Anatoly Kagansky that I would do you a serious in-

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jury. I promised him, Davydov. And it's payoff time, wouldn't you say?"

The previous filmed glaze in Davydov's eyes had turned to a wet-looking smear. "What are you talking about?" His voice ascended to a hoarse bleat.

"What are you *talking* — "

"Your attitude," Lyudin said, softly. "Toward Kagansky. Toward agents in the field. Toward me."

"What in the *hell* are you talking about? I'm not — "

"I'm talking about financing

Did you know...

Intelligence gathering seems to mean clandestine meetings in darkened rooms, or cadres of top-flight officials and scientists studying a problem for weeks on end. But every *fact* is intelligence, and many times the more commonplace bits of information are the more revealing.

In 1979, the Carter Administration charged that the U.S.S.R. was actively pursuing a biochemical war strategy in violation of several treaties. They offered a catastrophe at a chemical plant in the city of Sverdlovsk as proof.

The United States contended, and the U.S.S.R. denied, that an accident in a factory involved in the manufacture of an anthrax virus, used for Soviet military purposes, had resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people.

When the accident occurred, the city was cut off from the outside world, yet Washington still got the inside story. In comparing a series of satellite photos of the city, the intelligence agencies found that there were significantly more graves in the cemeteries in the newer pictures than in the first ones taken.

In the end, the Kremlin admitted the catastrophe and claimed that a shipment of anthrax-infected meat had been responsible. Someone, somewhere in the U.S.S.R., realized that, though they could "hide" the cause, they could not hide the effect.

O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive. *Sir Walter Scott*

Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things . . . The giddy line midway. *Robert Browning*

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my retirement; what else? *Your* financing it, actually." He rose to his feet. Davydov's chair lurched as he tried to slide closer to his desk. "No!" Lyudin said sharply. "No grabbing for the phone. No pressing an alarm buzzer. No reaching for the Makarov semi-automatic in your desk, which Kagansky also told me about."

He slowed to emphasize each word. "Sit. Quietly. Hands folded. Let me show you why I seriously recommend it."

He removed a small glass vial from his right-hand pocket. He unscrewed the cap carefully, then leaned across Davydov's desk and spilled a deliberate one-two-three drops of a colorless liquid upon the desk's close-grained mahogany. The wood sizzled audibly, while the hard fibers peeled away from each other as the acid bubbled and fizzed its way into the wood for three-quarters of an inch.

Davydov's chair squeaked loudly as he scooted backwards. His eyes were enormous. "You wouldn't — !"

"The amount in the vial probably won't kill you," Lyudin interrupted him again. "But if you get it in the face, it's enough to make you spectacularly recognizable for the rest of your life. No plastic surgeon can repair features splashed with this acid. Are you listening, Davydov?" The fat man nodded dumbly. His features glistened with perspiration. "All right. Take down the picture on the wall and open the safe."

Davydov scrambled to comply. His shirt clung to him damply. He feverishly attacked the dial of the safe, disclosed when the picture was removed, while Lyudin recapped the vial of acid and returned it to his right-hand pocket. He moved closer as Davydov flung the safe's door open. "There!" he croaked.

Lyudin gazed approvingly upon the tightly-banded packets of large-denomination U.S. dollars, British pounds, Swiss francs, and West German marks. "Dump it all on the floor," he directed. "I wouldn't want to be clumsy enough to trip a hidden mechanism designed to prevent loss, and I assure you, neither would you."

It took Davydov quite some time. Not only was the bulk of the packaged money substantial, but Lyudin was amused to note that Davydov was working more and more slowly. "Beginning to realize how you're going to look to The Group upstairs when you have to explain this?" Lyudin jibed.

Davydov stepped to one side,

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the safe emptied. "You'll never get out of the building!" he declared, with more of his usual arrogance.

"Then let's get on with it, shall we?" Lyudin removed a vial of colorless liquid from his left-hand pocket and uncapped it.

"No, no, no, no!" Davydov screamed. He crossed his arms in front of his face and plunged to the floor, landing on top of the money. Lyudin stood above him, waiting silently. Davydov's fear wouldn't permit his not knowing what was going on. His arms parted sufficiently to disclose his nose, mouth and one eye. He screamed again when he saw the movement in Lyudin's arm.

Lyudin dashed the contents of the vial of water into the visible portion of Davydov's face. Almost in the same motion, he plucked an ampule from another pocket and crushed it beneath Davydov's nostrils, his own head turned to one side. Davydov twitched convulsively, then went limp.

Lyudin moved quickly away from the range of the powerful muscle relaxant. He went to Davydov's desk and removed the Makarov, which was exactly where Anatoly Kagansky had said it would be. Back beside Davydov, Lyudin produced another ampule, bright red in color. He squeezed the real blood in it all over Davydov's shirtfront, then placed the semi-automatic on the floor beside Davydov's hand.

When the fat man regained consciousness in a few hours, his overweening, held-over impression would be that he had received a vialful of acid in the face. When he opened his eyes, his secondary impression would be that he had been shot in the chest with his own gun. Both impressions would create an unhealthy Davydov psyche.

Lyudin went to work then, first removing Davydov's keys from a belt-loop. He chose the larger of the two suitcases he found in Davydov's closet and packed the money in it. He had listened a dozen times to the tape he'd made of Anatoly Kagansky's whispery, dying voice disclosing all the details of Davydov's office.

He went back to the desk, opened its bottom drawer, and pressed the "stop" button on Davydov's tape recorder that had been silently memorializing the entire affair. He slipped the cassette into his jacket pocket. He located Davydov's agency badges for men in the field in another drawer, again exactly where Kagansky had said they would be. The badges

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were sent down to the front entrance upon the field men's rare appearances at headquarters, as Lyudin's had been.

He selected Yevgeny Golodkin's badge and took it into Davydov's washroom. Despite what The Group liked to think, they didn't always learn about things as soon as they happened. They didn't know yet that Golodkin had died ten days before in Tripoli. Lyudin knew it only because of the agent-grapevine, a message from a Bulgarian colleague in Venice.

He propped Golodkin's badge, with its picture of the deceased agent, in front of the mirrored washstand, then dipped into his pockets again. He used part of the contents of a tube of make-up to darken his features to an approximation of Golodkin's coloring. He also applied a small, false mustache of the type Golodkin had worn. He made no attempt at perfection. A rough resemblance would do.

Lyudin couldn't leave the Office of the State Security without clearance from Alexei Davydov, who had accepted control of him. But no one had accepted control of Yevgeny Golodkin. No one would care when or if Golodkin left the building.

He gathered up his various materials and restored them to his pockets. He tried on three hats he found in Davydov's closet and selected the least ill-fitting. He stopped at Davydov's desk again, to apply a sticker to the suitcase that would keep the guards from examining it.

His final act was to cut the wire on Davydov's telephone. He picked up the suitcase then, opened the office door, and checked the corridor. It was empty, as he had expected. Nobody hung around Alexei Davydov's office, and the man's manner and attitude were such that his meetings were not lightly broken in upon. Lyudin stepped outside and locked the office, using Davydov's keys.

He made his way back to the front entrance, moving purposefully but unhurriedly.

No one took more than a casual glance at him.

Out on the street, he gave the building a final salute, then walked away.

At noon the next day, he met Natasha and Irina and the children in front of the fifteen-room *Inn of the Golden Samovar.* Fifty years before it had been a nunnery. Its great advantage was that very few Muscovites knew about it.

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The women studied him, outwardly placid. The children enveloped him in a pinwheeling small cloud. He knelt to embrace them. Two girls and a boy resembled Irina's blonde, leggy athleticism. Twin boys and another girl possessed Natasha's roundness and dark good looks. Facially, all the children resembled Lyudin.

He drew the women aside, after a moment. From each handbag, he removed all of the identification papers with which they had traveled from Sochi and Kotze to Moscow. He replaced these with new passports and papers, the best that money could buy.

"The plane reservations are in your new names," he told them. "You leave on the first flight in the morning. Night flights are checked too closely. Stay at the inn here tonight. The Swiss numbered account is in both your names. The bank will send you the necessary papers and passkeys, within a week, to the chalet near the Matterhorn. Have a good trip, and I'll see you in six months."

He kissed each woman quickly, added to each handbag a thick-feeling sheaf of Swiss francs, then walked away. With luck, he might indeed see them in six months, he reflected. It depended upon how hard the apparat came after him. But even the apparat would never find his families.

Tomorrow he would employ the expensive underground courier service to transfer the suitcase of money to the Swiss bank. Tomorrow, too, he would have two duplicates made of the cassette tape he had removed from Davydov's office.

He would have a tape delivered to the District Party Leader as well as to the home address of the Director of the KGB. The tapes might be all the luck he needed, if either man decided he didn't care to have broadcast Alexei Davydov's recent activities within the apparat. Some stones cast into a pool created more widening ripples than others. The manner of Lyudin's disappearance might be winked at.

Davydov's situation, on the other hand, was totally predictable. The man would have a lot of time in the icebox-of-the-east to regret his attitudes and activities. And even if it was decided that the apparat's own peculiar sense of justice required Lyudin's apprehension and punishment, he still liked his chances.

After all, he had hidden successfully before, sometimes for years. He had had very, very good instructors. †

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FATHER ADAM

by Mel Washburn

Fred Mallow tried to relax and settle back into the cane-bottom easy chair, but the effort was a failure. Every muscle in his body was as tense as a steel spring. Round, grey pearls of sweat rolled down his cheeks and dripped from his chin, even though the chill of evening had settled over the city. And his sunburned face had a sickly, yellow cast, almost green around the edges.

"We were right about that priest, weren't we?" the Information Officer asked him. "Reports indicate you've had some real success out there."

His hand trembling, Fred Mallow lit a cigarette, then blew out the match. "Yes, I had success. So much success, I almost died from it." He coughed drily and stubbed out the cigarette. "Let me have a drink, will you? Then I'll tell you everything."

The Father was glad to see me, glad to see a bona fide, college-educated agricultural expert from the States. "I've been helping the people here in small ways," he told me, "suggesting how they might improve their lot. But I'm running out of ideas."

I assured him that I had a whole satchel full of ideas he could use — which was true. I actually do have a degree in Ag Science. And in my twenty-three years with the Agency, I've done agricultural advising in half the dysentery-ridden, godforsaken backwaters of the southern hemisphere. But when the Father took me around and showed me what he'd been doing, I realized that he had already worked miracles, albeit small ones, upon which I could never hope to improve. I've spent many tedious hours explaining to half-savage peasants of every race and ethnic persuasion how a few modern methods could double their yield or produce a cash crop instead of useless fodder. And nine times out of ten they would just nod and smile and ignore every word I'd said.

But in this case, for Father Adam, they'd listened and they'd followed through. They'd terraced, they'd irrigated, they'd drained a marsh and rotated their crops. They'd done

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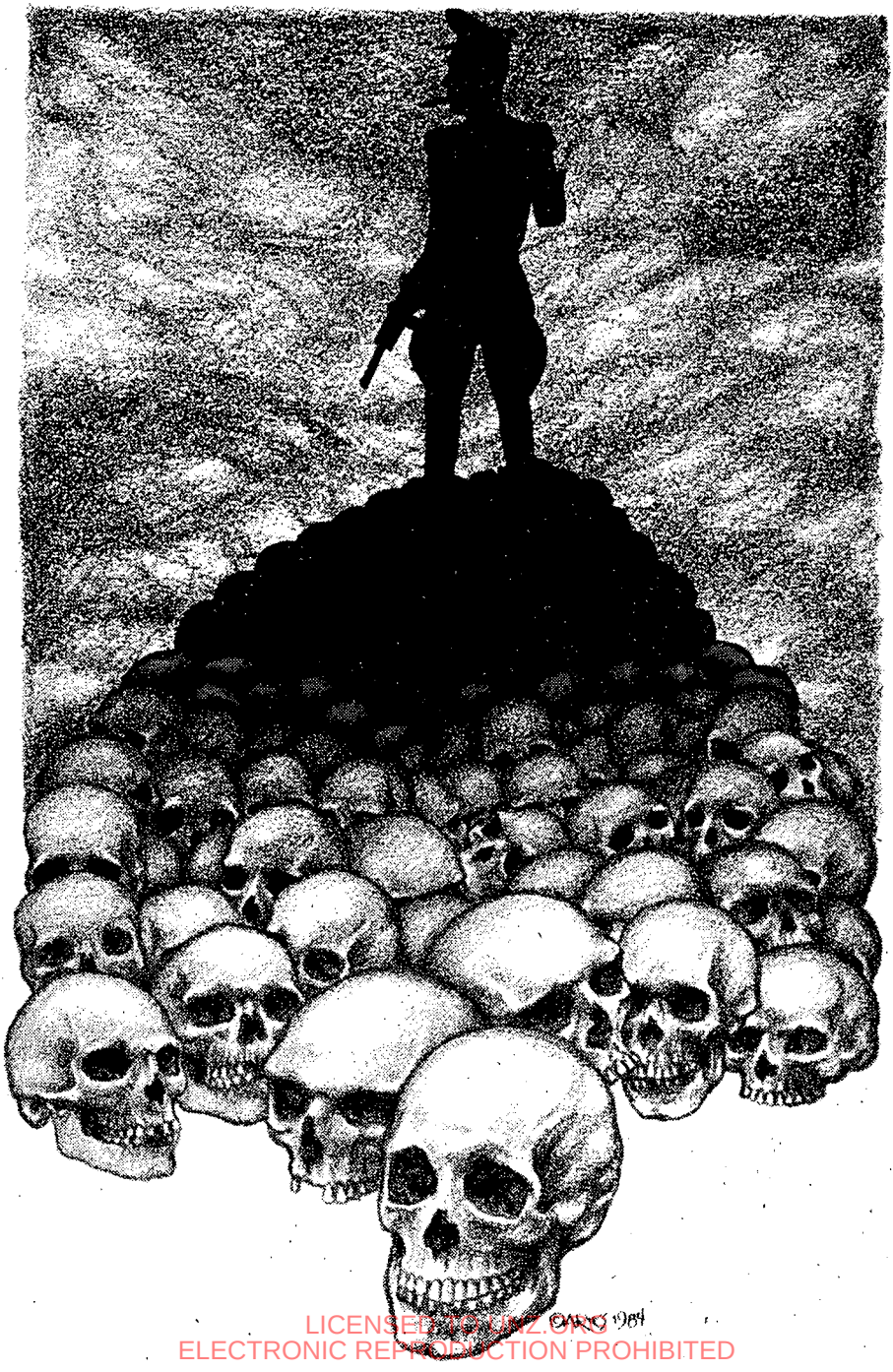

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everything they should, *only* because he'd told them to. It was a miracle, all right.

He was the most persuasive, most attractive man I'd ever met. Not that he was handsome, far from it — did you ever see him? No? Well, he was an old man, way past seventy, gray-haired, weather-beaten, scrawny, and pot-bellied, with a huge nose, wrinkled and brown like a rotten potato. But he was strong as an ox, and he could work from morning to night. Something like that impresses a peasant.

And there was something about the way he listened when you talked, really listened, with his head cocked to one side...well, you felt he was listening directly to your soul. And then his eyes, they were a deep sea-blue, clear and calm. His whole mind and spirit spoke to you through those eyes.

...What? Yes, I know. This is an official report, not a poetry festival. I know. I'm just trying to give you a sense of...well, all right. Where was I?

Oh, yes.

I couldn't be of any real help to the people there. You can't improve on perfection. But I didn't admit this to the Father, of course. Instead, I shared his roof and table for seven weeks, and worked with him in the village. We talked until late at night, he and I, quite often. I expressed sentiments I didn't really feel. And gradually he came to trust me, so that one evening, quite unexpectedly, he asked, "Would you like to meet the future, the only real hope this village has? Not something I've suggested, but something they've begun themselves?"

I said of course I would.

And he led me across the plaza to the schoolhouse where, with the shutters drawn and the doors locked, some villagers were holding a meeting by candlelight. There were half a dozen of them, young fellows mostly, sitting around a table strewn with books and newspapers and legal documents. "This is the Laborers' Legal Association," the priest told me.

"How wonderful," I said. And I sat down to talk with them.

They were a hard-core group, all right. Not violent, not yet, but determined. Their program was to help the people to own the land they worked on. "Where will they get the money to buy it?" I asked.

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Well, they said, the *padrones* would have to begin paying decent wages. And when a family had saved enough money, the *padron* would have to sell them the land at a fair price.

"But suppose he won't sell?" I asked.

"Why, then, we'll reason with him until he does," said the spokesman for the group, a schoolteacher named Fuentes, a young man, very handsome, with black hair and white teeth. He'd been to school in the capital, but had come back to his village to help his people.

"And if he still won't sell?"

"Then we'll burn his house down," said another man, a grizzled old bird called Simon, the local malcontent; lost his family to plague, lost the sight in one eye, but somehow struggled along from season to season, planting his crop and cursing his fate.

Like I say, they weren't violent yet, but you could see how things were likely to go. So I memorized all their faces and, during the next few days, made a point of learning their names and where they lived.

Then I sent in my report, and it began to bring results almost immediately.

It was the fourth day after that meeting, when the Father and I went out for a morning walk along the Army Road. And a little ways out of the village, we came upon something which you see all the time along city streets here, but up there in the mountains, it's quite unusual.

We saw a couple of corpses.

It was two of the young men from the meeting, each one of them shot once in the forehead. And they'd been mutilated, either before or after death, the way they usually are in such cases. You know, you see them down here so often that after a while it's not really shocking. You don't notice them any more than you would a damp cigar butt or a pile of horse dung that's been left lying in the street.

But out there on the Army Road, we stopped in our tracks. "This is terrible!" the Father said. His eyes were clear and sharp as ever, but no longer calm. He was very angry. "Something must be done!"

He found the relatives of the two murdered boys — they'd been brothers — and a whole procession went out from the

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village, the women weeping and tearing their hair out, the men grim and silent. But Father Adam didn't go with them. He went to the garrison at the lower end of the village and demanded to see the sergeant.

Which I hoped would be a waste of time. You know how these *Guardia* types are, pint-sized Hitlers most of them, and this sergeant was no exception, strutting about the village in his trooper boots, with a long, greasy moustache and those silvered sunglasses that just gave you back your own reflection when you tried to look him in the eye.

But that morning, when the Father pushed his way into the sergeant's office, all the cockiness seemed to have been drained out of the little rooster. He was sweating, almost trembling. And his large, brown eyes (he'd forgotten to put on his sunglasses) were full of fear and pleading. He could see big trouble coming, with no way for him to save face, and he was terrified.

He begged the Father to calm down, to keep his voice low.

But the Father was furious. "I won't have it!" he shouted. "I won't have that sort of dirty business up here. Let them practice their bloody tricks in someone else's back yard."

The sergeant cajoled and pleaded. He almost wept. There were "new elements" in the district. "New conditions," he said, which were only temporary. "If the Father would just be patient."

But the Father wouldn't. He was so forceful, I had to admire him in spite of myself. He demanded that the sergeant begin an immediate investigation. And to my surprise, the sergeant at last agreed. He put on his helmet and sunglasses and came along with us.

Outside, in the dusty gravel courtyard of the little brick fortress, three or four soldiers stood together in a knot, chatting and laughing. As we passed by, they stared at us *gringos* with contemptuous insolence, until the sergeant, having put on his authority with his sunglasses, ordered them to go about their business.

I'd seen this sort of thing on the Ivory Coast once, just before a mutiny. But never anything like it in this village. Clearly the whole situation there was changing, deteriorating very rapidly. Which wasn't what I'd planned at

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all.

The sergeant looked at the corpses, made some notes, and promised action. But the next morning, the Father and I found another one of the men from the meeting: his mutilated corpse had been laid out very precisely in the exact same location as the first two.

And the morning after that, we found the unfortunate sergeant laid out on the Father's doorstep with a hole in his head. This time, when the Father went to the garrison, its heavy wooden gates were shut and barred, and no amount of knocking and shouting would get them open.

"I'll catch the assassins myself, then," declared the Father.

And while he was deciding how to go about it, I began to worry that the whole situation would get completely out of hand. These butchers that the General sends out on such jobs always go a little too far, you know. One almost comes to expect a certain excess from them. If two corpses will get the job done, they invariably produce six or eight. If a public execution is required, they'll massacre an entire family. They're always going a little too far.

But the butcher in charge of this particular operation had murdered a local official, which was an unprecedented excess, at least in my experience. Would he stop at that, or would he go on to murder a U.S. citizen — the Father himself — and so create an international incident, which would compromise our entire effort here?

I worried about all this. And, to be honest, I worried about the Father for his own sake. He was such a wonderful man.

So I tried to dissuade him from chasing around after the killers, but he wouldn't be dissuaded. "My duty is clear," he told me. "And besides, I have a plan."

He reasoned that a death squad must have somehow gotten a list of the men in the laborers' association. Because of the murders, several of those men had run off to hide in the bush. Only old Simon was still working his field, and the schoolteacher was still in his school, teaching. "They'll go there next, those murderers," the Father said. "And when they do, I'll catch them."

I had with me a fine camera, one of those instant-picture kind, with some flash equipment. The Father asked if he

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could borrow it, to which I agreed, and I tried to teach him how to use it. But his thick farmer's fingers couldn't make the fine movements necessary to take good pictures, especially in the darkness and mists of those highland nights.

So I said, "It's okay, I'll be your cameraman." Figuring that way, perhaps, I could derail the Father's plan at the crucial moment.

So that night, we posted ourselves outside the school and waited: two *Yanquis* with a camera; out to "get the truth" in that alien, tropical land, where the government is usually the prime source of disorder; where the police are often the murderers; where politics is practiced by means of the feud and the vendetta; where random execution of the innocent is often more beneficial to public order than the systematic pursuit of the guilty. And all the time I was thinking, *It's ridiculous, really, what the Father hopes to accomplish here.*

And the first night, nothing happened. And the second. Then, on the third night, after the moon had risen and set and the solid darkness of the night had settled in, we heard the low growl of a jeep's engine, the whine of its gears as it climbed the steep roadway toward us. Nearer and nearer it came, finally entering the plaza where we lay hidden. It showed no headlights, but someone stood on the running-board with a flashlight, scanning the door fronts until they found the school. Then they piled out of the jeep, leaving it with its motor running, and began bashing away at the schoolhouse door.

"Wait thirty seconds," the Father whispered to me, "then take the picture."

"Hold on a second," I said, but it was too late. He'd already crept away into the darkness.

Well, I decided, wherever he's gone, whatever he's planning to do after I snap the picture, it just won't happen, because I'm not snapping. And I settled down into the shadows, making myself as invisible as possible, prepared to wait out the entire incident, then take the Father safely home again.

But the father outsmarted me. In a few moments, the sound of the jeep's motor, which they had left unattended, died away: he had switched off the ignition. And then he

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began shouting at them. He demanded to know who they were and on whose orders they acted.

They stopped hammering on the door and shone their flashlight on the priest. Then they laughed at him.

He urged them to think of their mothers, of their country, of their religion. To call to mind the meekness of the blessed and the justice of the saints. Then someone gave the command, and they shot him dead.

Without quite thinking, I snapped a picture as their weapons roared. Then, as they stood frozen in surprise, I snapped another. Then I ran like a frightened rabbit, and I've been running ever since.

I ran out of town and lay until sun-up in the beanfields, then made my way to the house of that old man, Simon.

Of the two photos I'd taken, one was blurred and useless. But the other clearly showed five men in army fatigues. They had turned their jackets inside out so that no insignia showed, but Simon and I recognized them as men from the garrison in our own village, all except for one of them who, though he was dressed like the others, couldn't have been in the *Guardia*: his left sleeve was folded and pinned at the shoulder.

This was the General's butcher, and a man I'd probably worked with, in a remote sense, as long as I'd been in the country, though I'd never seen him before. And he, as it turned out, had never seen me.

My camera and equipment we threw down the hole of Simon's privy. My *gringo* clothes we burned in his stove, and I put on the coarse muslin shirt and grimy trousers of a fieldhand. Then the two of us walked down into the valley and waited by the Army Road for the bus into the city.

You know how those busses are: in the States, they'd just be school busses, but here they take the doors off, paint them a hundred garish colors (this one had a mural on its side of black wolves battling green serpents with a lot of red splotches and white fangs everywhere) and load them up with twice the safety-limit of people, kids, and dogs, then tie an equal number of chickens, pigs, and boxes on top. The engine groaned, the gears squealed, and the whole thing tilted dangerously to one side and then the other as it went

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back and forth down the winding road to the coast. Simon found a seat on one of the fenders, and I got squeezed in the middle somewhere between a couple of large *mamacitas* sitting on packing crates. Everybody was laughing and talking; there was even some organized singing up near the front; and a couple of people sold refreshments out of rusty ice chests. There was the smell everywhere of dust and sweat and hot peppers and pork grease.

But as we rounded one long bend near the bottom of the valley, everyone got very quiet. At first, I couldn't see why, but then the bus came to a halt, people began getting out, and I caught a glimpse of rifle barrels. It was a roadblock; two jeeps, their serial numbers daubed over with mud, and a half-dozen armed men in fatigues, their jackets inside-out and their faces masked.

They herded the women all to one side of the road and the men all to the other. There was a lot of whispered praying and more than a little plain old moaning in the crowd.

I managed to keep quiet, though my legs felt like jelly and I figured I was as good as dead.

But apparently they weren't exactly sure who to be looking for. The man with the one arm was there, very clearly in charge. He had a fistful of glossy photos, and he marched down the row of men, comparing each one's face with each of the photos. (It certainly was dextrous, how he flipped through the stack of photos with just the fingers of one hand.) For a moment, as he came down the line, he stared very hard into my face, his wicked green eyes peering out of the dark holes in his mask. But with sunburned face and filthy hair, I guess I just looked like any other *campesino*. Or at least I didn't look like any of the photos, so he passed me by.

Three of the men, Simon included, he ordered off the road into a ditch. Everyone else, me included, he put back onto the bus. Simon never said a word to me or even glanced in my direction, and I did the same. The bus went on around the bend, out of sight of the roadblock, and not long afterwards we heard the rattle of gunfire.

After a few hours, the bus rolled into the city, passing first through the *barrios* of tincan and cardboard hovels, then

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emerging into the *Avenida Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, with its shops, its traffic cops, its hustle and bustle. And I began to feel safe. Not that the death squads don't operate in the city, but I figured they'd never dare to kill an American there.

Though I guess I figured wrong.

I went to my room at the Sheraton, cleaned up, changed clothes and so on, which was probably a mistake: now I looked like myself instead of like a dirty *granjero*.

Then I sat down and thought things through. I never should have taken those photos, I knew. But I had, nonetheless. I had snapped the picture of that one-armed butcher, and by heaven I was going to turn him in. He'd gone too far, much too far, in shooting down the Father. If I let him get away with it, pretty soon no American would be safe in the country. Then how could fellows like you and me operate here?

And besides, the Father had been a wonderful man. He'd been a saint, almost, and his murderer had to be punished.

So I caught a taxi to the *Palacio de la Justica*, intending to look up the prosecutor general, whom I'd met at a couple of embassy functions here. But when I got there, the windows were all dark and the doors were shuttered. I went up the limestone steps and knocked, but with no result. I couldn't believe they were closed so early in the afternoon. I wondered why.

And then I noticed, on the street corner, a small group of men in khaki uniforms, chatting with a man in dark glasses and a white business suit. They glanced up at me, just for an instant, with the same look of insolence I'd gotten from the young soldiers in the courtyard of the villiage garrison. Then the man in the suit stuck a cigar in his mouth and with the same hand struck a match. It certainly was dextrous, how he cupped his hand at the same time to keep the match from blowing out.

Only then did I notice that the left sleeve of his suitcoat was rolled up and pinned at the shoulder.

And I realized then that the situation at the capital had deteriorated as gravely as it had in the village. Powerful new forces were at work, and the General's butcher now had the authority to shut down the *Palacio*, to simply cancel *Justica*

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for the day, all on my account.

I went back to the Sheraton and up to my room. I was trembling and sweating. I went into my little bathroom, shut the door, and bathed the back of my neck with cold water. And then with a deafening roar, the whole place rocked and shuddered, the lights flickered out, and I was knocked sideways into the shower stall. I thought we must be having another earthquake in the city.

But when I opened the bathroom door, I found my bedroom a complete ruin, the furniture smashed, the walls blackened, the air filled with a fine snowfall of mattress stuffings. Someone had planted a bomb there while I was out looking for justice.

So I came over here, even though it's against Agency policy to make direct contact. Here are my notes, here are the photos of the death squad. I'm sure I can identify the one-armed man, if you can just have him arrested. And I believe we should find out who's behind him, so we can neutralize them as well.

"I'll show these to our security chief in the morning," said the Information Officer, whose name was Jeffrey DeBrune. He took the photos and the notebook and locked them up in a desk drawer. "And probably the ambassador will want to have a look as well."

"I'm sure he will. The Father was an American citizen. And a wonderful man." Fred Mallow wiped the sweat from his chin.

"You've been through an awful lot, Fred," said DeBrune. "and I can't pretend that it's over. If these notes and photos are as potent as you say, then I'm afraid we can't guarantee your safety, not even here in the embassy."

The frightened man gulped the last of his drink and lit another cigarette. "I know that."

DeBrune pointed out the window, towards the harbor. "There's a cruise ship out there." On the glistening black water beneath the purple sky, it rode at anchor, its decks gaily lit by strings of colored lanterns. "She has over three hundred American tourists on board. You could easily blend in with the crowd and sail away with them in the morning."

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"I can't swim," said Mallow glumly.

DeBrune ventured a laugh. "You don't have to. I've arranged to have a small boat available, piloted by our most experienced man."

"I meant, I don't like the water. Not even when I'm in a boat."

DeBrune laughed again and shrugged his shoulders.

The harbor was a dangerous place for political fugitives. Mallow remembered how every morning a mutilated corpse or two would wash up on the beach or come floating up against the pilings of the docks. But there was no other way out of the country, except for the airport, which was heavily policed by the *Guardia*.

So he let DeBrune lead him down a darkened ramp to the embassy's private wharf. He strapped a Mae West jacket around his chest and clutched another in his arms for good measure, then stepped cautiously into the small motorboat, which bumped lazily against the rubber pads of the pier, its motor idly emitting a "burble-burble" into the still void of the night.

"You catch the man who killed Father Adam," he said to DeBrune. "You see justice done."

"We'll do our best," was the answer. "For now, you just take care of yourself."

"He was a wonderful man. And old Simon turned out to be pretty fine as well."

"I know. I know." DeBrune slipped the lines free. "Take good care, Jorge!" he shouted to the black silhouette which was the pilot, standing aloof in the stern. "Your passenger is a brave man!"

"I will, senor." The pilot gunned the engine and the boat glided out into the inky blackness of the harbor, heading obliquely towards the gaudy lights of the cruise ship. It rocked from side to side as it cut across the incoming waves.

"Please go slow," Mallow shouted to the pilot. "I get seasick easily."

But the pilot just laughed as he stuck a cigar in his mouth and with the same hand lit a match. It certainly was dextrous, how he cupped his hand to keep the match from blowing out. †

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Illustration by
Michael Sullivan

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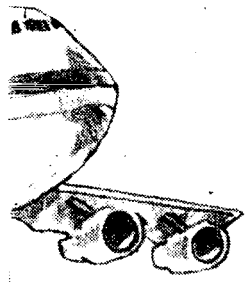
THE ZANZIBAR DIET

by Ron Goulart



About three seconds after the skyliner hit the raging blizzard, Jake Conger realized he'd been hoodwinked. This was not Pinchbeck World Airlines, flight 203 to sundrenched Acapulco.

He'd been uneasy ever since he boarded the plane at the Greater Los Angeles Airdrome two hours ago. All his fellow passengers looked too normal, too typical. Although Conger was no longer an agent of the United States government, he still had a sensitivity to imposters.

He stood up, a tall lean man in his early thirties. When he started to leave his seat, the not quite believable vacationing college boy across the aisle suggested, "Stay put, Conger."

"That's a soft G in my name," Jake corrected, sitting down and eying the youth. "Who're you with?"

"The United States Remedial

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Functions Agency," he answered. "I'm X-14. We met back in the year 2021 when you were — "

"I don't work for the Wild Talent Division anymore," Conger told him evenly. "I am completely and totally retired. Right now I am supposed to be enroute to sundrenched Acapulco, where I'm joining my wife for a much needed vacation from our thriving vegetarian restaurant in the idyllic town of Organic, California. You guys aren't going to kidnap me to some bleak northern — "

"Hush, Jake," advised the frazzled little man who was hurrying up the aisle toward him. "No need to make a big frumus. I'll explain everything." He was wearing a crimson, yellow, and green flowered shirt, rumpled white shorts and a wilting flower lei.

"Sure you will," said Conger, frowning. "Listen, Geer, I do not work for you or — "

"Well, technically you still do, Jake." Geer, his frizzled hair looking especially wild today, settled in beside him. "Nobody can really ever retire from the Wild Talent Division of the RFA. Consider how flattered you ought to be. They sent me, the head cheese of WTD, to recruit you for a perilous — "

"Kidnap is the word, not recruit. Abduct, impress, shanghai . . . why, by the way, are you got up like an Hawaiian tourist?"

"Got a new girl in our Disguise Department and she got her warm climates mixed," explained Geer. "The shirt is sort of nice, in my opinion. I've always been fond of dahlias."

"Those are geraniums, and I don't have to work for you."

His former boss explained, "In times of national emergency, I can call on you."

"You can maybe call, but I don't have to do a damn thing," Conger said as the plane lurched. "Now turn this spurious skyliner around and get me to Mexico."

"Wouldn't risk that even if I could," the frazzled chief of the Wild Talent Division explained. "Z-23 is posing as the pilot and he's not the kind of man I want to rattle. Not in midair during a blizzard."

"Z-23? Isn't he the one they used to call Blinky, because his eyesight is — "

"I couldn't get all firstrate agents for this little gambit, Jake. But since I knew you wouldn't come along unless I used some cunning, I was willing to risk — "

"Where are we heading?"

"Hopefully to Canada. New Montreal." He looked around

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Conger at the window. There was nothing out there but deep grey sky and swirling snow.

"Why Canada?"

"Good. You're getting interested in the assignment."

"I'm making small talk until I work out a way to take over this plane."

"Some of the nitwit RFA agents they stuck me with are trigger happy. They'll probably shoot you if you try anything dippy," cautioned Geer. "Because of the relatively low budget allotted for — "

"Okay, what's the problem?"

Hunching his narrow shoulders, the WTD headman said, "Have you heard of the Zanzibar Diet?"

"It's a new synthetic food developed in a hushhush lab on the island of Zanzibar." He glanced around at his fellow passengers, deciding some of them probably wouldn't stop at shooting him. "Cheap, nutritious and our US government thinks it's the answer to stopping starvation in the underdeveloped and impoverished nations."

"The stuff's made out of such tangy ingredients as ditchwater, seaweed, and cheap additives," continued Geer. "A single serving provides all your daily requirements of everything. And it can be molded, colored, and seasoned to resemble anything. Fudge brownies, BLTs, blueberry waffles."

"So what's wrong with it?"

Even more wrinkles joined those on Geer's forehead. "You know about Dr. Heinrich H. Luftwaffe, Jr?"

"One of the frozen Nazis they found hidden under Munich back in 2016."

"The guy had been a technological whiz during the 20th Century, and especially World War II. When they got him thawed out, he explained he'd never really supported Hitler and would love to do good deeds for democracy."

"So, in a joint venture of Africa 26 and America, he was funded to go to work on the starvation problem."

"We've always felt it's good policy to be against hunger."

Conger reminded, "You still haven't told me what's wrong."

"It's an unexpected turn of events like this that makes your goonies drop down into your galoshes," sighed Geer. "If you eat the gunk a couple of times, there are no side effects to speak of. However, six or seven meals of the halfwit stuff and you become docile, susceptible to mindcontrol, easily persuaded to do all sorts of goofy and suicidal things."

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"That's a drawback, sure enough."

"Do you realize what could happen if, say, six thousand cheeseburgers made of that glop were served at a US Militariforce base? I mean, if you repeated the meal five or six times. Or suppose you fed Zanzibar Diet chocolate malteds to our allies' troops at strategic locations?"

"A mess," agreed Conger. "So why not stop production of the stuff, then tell Dr. Luftwaffe to work out a new version that — "

"There's the halfwit problem, Jake. That's why I rigged the elaborate and daring way of recruiting you."

"Dr. Luftwaffe has disappeared?" guessed Conger.

"Like a fart in a windstorm." The forlorn government man took another sad look out the plane window. "Blinky used to be bothered by snow blindness. I sincerely hope — "

"Why are we attempting to get to Canada?"

"That's where, we're reasonably certain, Dr. Luftwaffe's been taken."

Conger nodded. "You think he's at Detention Acres in New Montreal."

"Our information leads us to believe that such is the nitwit case, yes."

"Detention Acres is co-run by the government of Canada and the Minimal British Empire," said Conger, rubbing his chin. "They usually keep just political prisoners there."

"You can imagine how futzed up things will get if the Limeys start fooling around with subversive donuts or toaster pastries," said the Wild Talent Division chief. "They could end up controlling the minds of a goodly portion of the yahoos on the face of the Earth."

"Seems to me you don't need me for this one," Conger told him, as the plane bumped along on its way to Canada. "You don't even need an agent with a wild talent. Any fairly competent RFA agent ought to be able to sneak into Detention Acres and spring Luftwaffe."

"Eleven have tried thus far." Geer held up his fingers.

"That's only ten."

"Well, one of 'em we never found the remains of."

"You've already tried WTD people?"

"Harlo Wingert, our best shapechanger, went in as a computer game repair man," said Geer, forlornly. "Back in my office, I've got the buttons off his allseason shorts. All that ever returned from — "

"He was a good chameleon."

"The best I had after Biller went bonkers and wouldn't im-

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personate anything but a bearskin rug."

"Who else tried?"

"The Great Orlando." Geer slumped further in the plane seat. "One of the best mind controllers I had. We got only as far as the second level downramp leading to the halfwit joint. I need you on this, Jake. All you have to do is turn invisible, slip in there, and come away with the Nazi yahoo."

"How much?"

"Um?"

"My fee?"

"The fate of your own, your native land, hangs in the halfwit balance, Jake, and you can't be so crass as to — "

"$200,000."

"$200,000? That'd eat up my budget for this sort of exercise for the next six years."

"Officially, I don't work for you any longer," reminded Conger. "I was retired. I sort of have to do maybe one or so missions per year, but I can pick and choose those. $200,000 bonus and I'll pick this mess."

"It's not only the destiny of America but of the whole free world maybe," added Geer. "$100,000. Tops."

"$150,000."

"$125,000 and not a farthing more."

"Sold," said Conger. "I'll have to contact Angelica and tell her I won't be showing up in Acapulco for a day or so. Then I want all the background you have on Dr. Luftwaffe, his researchers, the set-up on Zanzibar, and detailed plans of the Detention Acres facility."

Geer said, "I've got all that in the baggage compartment of this nitwit airplane."

Unlike many of the agents, reluctant and otherwise, in the WTD of the RFA, Conger hadn't been born with his wild talent. It had taken nearly two years, back when he was younger, naive and considerably more patriotic, to acquire the knack. Working in the Wild Talent Division's hidden Connecticut training school, Conger had learned how to become invisible. Partly, it was a mind control trick, adapted from an ancient Tibetan ritual. The rest of it depended on the careful use of a complex body lotion that, among other things, gave off highly pervasive mindclouding fumes.

Relatively few persons had the right mix of physical and psychological traits necessary for being invisible agents. Jake Conger was one such, and that was why frazzled, rumpled Geer wouldn't let him retire com-

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pletely. Conger was unorthodox, even for a Wild Talent operative — once, some years ago, he'd bargained with the opposition so that Angelica, now his wife, could be brought back from the dead — and most people at Remedial Functions weren't overly fond of him. But even RFA had to admit Conger got results.

Although Conger didn't usually dwell on what was over and done with, he was reviewing his past career as an unseen agent as he rode along in the barred compartment of the International Express Speedy Worldwide Prisoner Delivery landvan. He had been invisible since sneaking aboard, up in New Montreal, a little less than a half hour ago.

The only political prisoner being rushed down to Detention Acres this haul was the Reverend Ng'ombe Jike, a leader of the Canadian branch of the Kaffir Kommandos. A plump black man, he was suspected of plotting to blow up major portions of Toronto. Given a shot from a stungun on boarding, Reverend Jike slumbered in one of the sudoleather restraining chairs.

Detention Acres was six hundred feet beneath New Montreal and covered roughly six hundred acres of simulated suburban countryside.

The two guards at the wrought-iron gate at the end of the final downramp, both armed with kilguns, were human not android. That was yet another reason Geer wanted Conger for this job. Some of the simpler mechanisms couldn't be hoodwinked, and they would see him, but few humans could.

The sturdy landvan, after one of the armed guards took a perfunctory look into the back, went rolling into Detention Acres. It was always midmorning down there, and Conger noticed, as they drove by the country club, three foursomes out enjoying the golf course.

Each prisoner had a three bedroom ranchhouse of his own. According to the information Geer had provided him, Dr. Luftwaffe was possibly being detained in a white shingle house at #104 Pond Lane.

When the landvan halted at the real estate office next to the country club, and the back door was unlocked and yanked open, Conger eased invisibly out as the two plainclothes security men climbed in for the unconscious black reverend.

He recognized her voice while he was still out on the patio at the rear of the house.

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The backhouse guard, who carried only a stungun, was stationed next to the electrobarbeque unit. He didn't notice Conger at all.

The invisible agent moved closer to the screened family room.

Misty Maywine was sitting in there on a lucite sofa, smiling sweetly at the thin young man who was tied in a tin morris-chair. A husky blond man with a shockrod stood just behind the tin chair.

Misty, once the leading quiz show mistress in the British Isles and now a crack secret agent, was thirty-one and lovely. Her hair, at the moment, was an attractive taffy shade, and she was wearing a two-piece lycra clingsuit.

"Think hard now, Alfie," Misty said, in her slightly husky voice. "We're all rooting for you to give us the correct answer."

"I don't have to tell you a bloody thing," protested the young man in the chair. "Under the Traitor & Turncoat Act of 2019, I — "

"Oh, I'm sorry, love. Time ran out on that," said Misty. "The rod, Stanley."

"Yow!" said Alfie, when the big man touched the shockstick to his neck.

"Okay, what say we try our next question. Who'd you sell us out to?"

"Well . . . it . . . I think it was a chap from White Russia," answered the uneasy young man. "I know he paid me off in Noncommunist rubles. I had a deuced tough time converting those to — "

"Who was he, this White Russian fellow?"

"He never gave his real name, you know. I always had to use a code name to contact him."

"C'mon, Alfie," urged Misty, "you can tell us what that was. Think hard now."

"It was Buttercup."

"Did you ever see him in person?"

"Once."

"Bet you can describe him, especially if Stanley — "

"Big chap, husky. Built like Stan here. About forty, curly dark hair and moustache. Always yawning a lot while — "

"Sleepy Dalgov," said Conger inside his head, just as Misty spoke the name of the White Russian agent aloud.

"That might be the bloke's name. I don't know."

"How'd he get Dr. Luftwaffe out of Detention Acres?"

"He came in disguised as a computer game repairman," replied Alfie. "Snuck the doctor off in his landvan."

"And where did Sleepy Dalgov spirit him off to, Alfie?"

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"Don't have the foggiest."

"Oh, I think maybe you do."

"Nope, I . . . Yow!"

When it became evident Alfie had no idea where Dr. Luftwaffe had been taken, Conger moved around to the front of the house.

There was an alarm system rigged to every door and window, meaning he'd have to wait until Misty Maywine came out before slipping inside for a look around the place.

As he stood on a flagstone path, a bedroom door slid open and a small vacuubot came tottering out into the artificial sunlight.

Reeling on its four tiny wheeled feet, making a rattling, retching noise, it fell over some three yards away from Conger. It rolled over on its coppery back, wheels spinning, making hacking sounds.

Conger sprinted over and gave it an invisible kick.

From the vacnozzle in the ballhead popped a dusty twist of plaz rope that had been clogging the works. Cured, the servomech righted itself and returned to the chore of cleaning the bedroom Dr. Luftwaffe had occupied.

Conger kept the three inch snippet of rope. He rubbed at it with his fingers, sniffed it. "If this is a leftover from what Sleepy used to wrap the good doctor," he speculated, "then I know where they are."

He dropped the twist of rope into his pocket and it became invisible, too.

Conger had stepped through the secret panel in the bell tower of the halfscale Notre Dame Cathedral, and was making his way invisibly toward the open doorway across the room when Sleepy Dalgov called, "Jake, good to see you again. You're a sight for sore eyes."

That caused him to break his stride. He kept walking toward the doorway, but more slowly and cautiously.

"Jake, relax, my boy. I won't shoot you. In fact, I can't."

Crossing the threshold, Conger saw the bulky White Russion secret agent tied up with the same sort of plaz rope used to pull the halfsize bells. There was no one else in the room. Next to the cot the agent was sprawled on was a white-covered table crowded with silverlidded serving dishes and utensils.

"Where's Dr. Luftwaffe?"

"I'm glad you asked me, my boy," confided Dalgov. "And why am I glad? Because after I was set upon and trussed up, they fed me a dozen meals of

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the Zanzibar Diet — the spinach pie was not too terrible, but the mushroom pizza nearly did me in. The result is that I'm so docile and cooperative, I'll tell everybody anything."

"How come you can see me?" Conger entered the small room and sat on the edge of the cot.

"I wish, believe me, I couldn't. Because it was a real pain having special lenses permanently welded to my eyeballs," he explained. "We're the only ones who have the process so far, and I tried to tell them that there are only a couple dozen invisible agents in the whole world. To have your eyeballs diddled with just so — "

"Mostly the invisible trick has to do with the hypnotic effects of the vapors from — "

"Don't tell me, I know. They also implanted a special filter up my nose."

"WTD should've known about your breakthrough."

"But that's what makes espionage and intrigue," said the White Russian, chuckling. "We have secrets, you have secrets. We each try to find out the other's. For example, you found out I brought Dr. Luftwaffe here."

"You used some of this same special Parisian bellringer rope to tie him up before you carried the guy off," Conger told him. "I knew you were fond of Instant Paris and had holed up here before."

"Now, see, I didn't know you knew that, Jake. That's what makes this business so stimulating and keeps you on your toes."

"Though why you'd want to come to Instant Paris more than once is — "

"I've got a very short attention span," explained Dalgov, yawning. "The real Paris, ten miles from here, is too big. Takes too long to see and enjoy. For me, and millions of other busy tourists, Instant Paris is the answer. You can, and I actually clocked myself on this once, see every worthwhile Parisian sight — or rather, a reasonably scaled down version thereof — in just a shade over twenty-two minutes. You want to toss in a gourmet meal at a cordon bleu fast food setup, seven minutes more."

"Who got Luftwaffe away from you?"

Dalgov yawned again. "Excuse it, I always get real drowsy after a big meal."

"Who?"

The chubby secret agent chuckled. "Really, I shouldn't be telling you this, but, like I explained, I can't help myself.

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That Zanzibar Diet stuff is powerful. What was the question?"

"Who highjacked Dr. Luftwaffe?"

"Fellow named Lash Leffingwell," he answered. "Black man, from your country originally. It's sort of amusing, my boy, since he wants Luftwaffe for entirely different reasons. The mindcontrol thing, his people couldn't care less. What they want is to suppress a cheap food manufacturing process that threatens — "

"That's because Leffingwell is an ace troubleshooter for the Common Market Junk Food Advisory Board," cut in Conger. "This stuff will take away lots of their markets."

After yawning enthusiastically, Dalgov murmured, "Tried to explain to . . . him that . . . the mindcontrol aspect could be used by them . . . persuade people eat their products . . . but Lash Leffing . . . well . . . says they prefer to use good advertising . . . to sell their junk food . . . informed him he should . . . have used advertising on me . . . instead of ropes and . . . " He started to nod off.

Conger poked him in the ribs. "Where'd Leffingwell take the doctor?"

"Really . . . sleepy . . . my only flaw as a . . . spy . . . ever tell you about the time . . . slept for six and a half weeks . . . "

"Tell me where he's taking Dr. Luftwaffe," Conger shook him by the arms.

Giving a chuckling yawn, Dalgov muttered, "Purloined letter . . . " and fell into a deep sleep.

Being invisible, Conger didn't have to pay the $25 fee for the vidmovie studio tour busride. The landbus moved slowly across the Zanzibar Macrojungle Studio and made frequent stops for the smattering of tourist passengers to look at the sights. There were only two films in production today, in the simulated jungle. One was an historical film dealing with the Second World War, pretending the Zanzibar studio jungle was part of the China-Burma-India theater. Several fierce-looking P-40 airplanes were parked on a clearing for this one and the landbus made a stop there.

Conger disembarked at that point, and went heading for the cluster of studio buildings a mile away. As he walked unseen along a flagstone path that cut through the foliage, he heard a caterwauling cry from up ahead.

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Reaching the spot, he found the other vidmovie production was being shot there. Titled *Lord Keystroke*, it dealt with the adventures of a fellow raised in the jungle by a supportive bunch of chimpanzees.

Just leaving the cluster of vidcrewmen and chimps was a lanky black man in a two-piece skyblue cazsuit. It was Lash Leffingwell of the Common Market Junk Food Advisory Board.

Quietly, Conger followed him.

He'd interpreted Dalgov's last remark correctly. Dr. Luftwaffe was being held in an obvious place. And the most obvious, and thus easy to overlook, was the island of Zanzibar itself. The background material Conger'd gone over on the bumpy flight to Canada had included scale maps of Zanzibar and details of everything on the island. He'd remembered, when Leffingwell's name had come up, that the CMJFAB owned 23% of this vidmovie operation.

Leffingwell, strolling briskly, bypassed the office buildings and headed for the domed commissary.

The guard at the door was human and he buzzed the door for Leffingwell. Conger sprinted and got inside with him.

Passing the dining rooms, Leffingwell hurried along a series of slanting, curving ramps until he stopped at the door marked *Pantry 3*. He tapped on it five times.

When the door hissed open, Leffingwell entered.

So did Conger.

It was chilly in the big room. Huge freezers hulked on three sides. A plump blonde woman, in a two-piece white bizsuit, was bending over an open freezer, peering anxiously into it.

"I don't like his looks, Lash," she said.

"No need to worry, Olga, he's — "

"No, I really fear something's wrong. Take a gander. Should he be this blue?"

Making an impatient noise, the black man crossed to the freezer. "He looks fine to me."

"But just look at the hamburger underneath Dr. Luftwaffe," persisted the plump woman. "See how red and nice it appears. He, on the other hand, looks bluish and spooky."

"Because he's a scientist and not a hundred pounds of chopped meat."

Conger joined them, unseen, at the freezer. The missing Dr. Luftwaffe was wrapped in a huge plaz freezerbag, lying in there on his back. Stiff and frozen, he didn't appear to be in

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the best of health.

Olga sighed sadly and then tapped the frozen scientist. "He might spoil."

"Really, I don't give a darn," Leffingwell told her. "Just so he can't produce any more of the Zanzibar Diet over at the lab across the island. Since, being a secretive and sly fellow he keeps the full recipe in his head, we've effectively stalled them."

"Seems unfair and nasty in a way. People are starving all over the — "

"And now they'll have to buy *our* cheap food."

"Um . . . " She tapped the doctor once again. "Maybe we should thaw him out, you know, and ask him if he's okay. He really doesn't look anywhere near as good as the hamburger, or even the pork sausage, and — "

He was frozen for decades and decades under Munich," said Leffingwell. "He's used to it. There's no need to be — "

"That's odd, Lash."

"What is?"

"The way that enormous leg of mutton is floating up out of the next freezer and making right for your head . . . Oh, my!"

Conger, fully visible, was stretched out on a warm, sundrenched stretch of Acapulco sand.

"Jake?"

Opening his eyes, he saw his pretty darkhaired wife standing over him with a portable pixphone held out at arm's length.

"Hmm?"

"It's him, Geer," Angelica explained. "Initially, I suggested several things he might do with his pixphone, but he insists this is important. When he mentioned an extra bonus, I decided to bring the phone down to you from the villa."

Sitting up, Conger put the phone on his lap. He clicked it on and Geer's wrinkled face and frazzled hair appeared on the saucersize screen. "Now what?" Conger inquired.

"Didn't your lovely spouse tell you?" said the WTD chief. "The president is elated."

"About what?"

"How well you did on your mission. Bravely getting Dr. Luftwaffe from the clutches of the opposition, daringly returning him to the lab from whence — "

"It was only across a dinky island."

"Ah, but snatching him from under their nitwit noses, then commandeering one of those clunky WWII planes and flying away in it . . . impressive," said Geer. "I hear several of the tourists broke into applause as

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you winged skyward to — "

"The bonus?"

"An extra $10,000." Geer smiled, expectantly.

"That's all?"

"On top of the already agreed upon $125,000. Jake, it adds to the tidy sum of — "

"I know what it adds up to."

"Oh, and there's a small snag, which I hope you'll accept in the spirit in which it's intended."

"Just have your computer transfer the dough to my Banx account computer and — "

"We can do that with the $125,000, yes," said the Wild Talent Division chief. "The $10,000 extra, though . . . The president hopes you won't mind taking it in Nixon half dollars. See, the yahoo public, and I can't truly say I blame them all that much, has never taken to those Nixon coins, and we've got a whole stewpot of them piled up around the mint, gathering cobwebs. Anyway, they'll be shipped out to your California address as soon as — "

"I am now," explained Conger, "officially commencing my interrupted vacation. Adios." He turned off the pixphone, tossed it aside, and motioned to Angelica.

She sat down beside him on the warm sand. †

FREDERICK FORSYTH

A full-length, in depth, interview with Frederick Forsyth will appear in the June issue of ESPIONAGE Magazine. Don't miss it!

Ernest Volkman, a master of real-life espionage affairs, has pulled out all the stops to make this interview with one of the world's greatest spy thriller writers the best ever written!

FREDERICK FORSYTH... the June issue of ESPIONAGE...on-sale April 11, 1985.

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Spying Through

The strike had been swift and efficient. Stores of rebel supplies had been located and destroyed. Local rebel bands had tried to stop the assault, but were turned away. First Lexington, and then Concord; the British moved with surety and calculation. They knew where they were going and what they wanted.

Having accomplished their search and destroy mission, the British returned to Boston as the rebels chased behind them. The rebels had been surprised, they had been routed, and they had been betrayed. For the British were not acting out of blind luck, nor from the reconnaissance work of a British spy. No, they were working with information provided them by one of the most respected of the upstart patriots. For all his neighbors' esteem, Dr. Benjamin Church, Jr. was a spy for the British.

□ □ □

Born to a Rhode Island deacon in Newport, 1734, and raised in Boston, Church graduated from Harvard, class of 1754. He went to England to study medicine at the London Medical College. When he finished his residency, he took a

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Time

by Joe Lewis

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wife from the English countryside. Together, they returned to Boston where Church set up a reasonably successful practice. He also took up a pronounced interest in colonial politics.

A convincing orator, astute thinker, and published author and poet, Church soon rose to a position of much responsibility in the independence movement. He served on various revolutionary committees, the most important of which was the Committee of Public Safety. It was through his work on this committee, and his friendship with the most influential of the Sons of Liberty, that Church was able to secure the most guarded military and political secrets of the American Revolution.

By mid-summer, 1775, he obtained entrance to the Second Continental Congress, as an official representative from Massachusetts. He was much liked and was thereafter appointed Director and Chief Physician at the First American Army Hospital. By the middle of July, 1775, Church was at the height of his influence.

Church might have proven to be an even greater aid to the British than he was, if he had been able to keep his cover. But it was not to be. The story is worth recounting: His brother-in-law, a loyalist named Fleming, wrote him from Boston in cipher, imploring Church to give up the revolution (!) for the safety and full pardon of the British in Boston. In response Church then sent him a letter in cipher, which, although addressed to Fleming, was probably meant for Governor Gage's eyes. In this letter he hinted at "giving up the rebel cause," and also provided long descriptions of the various strengths of the rebel militias. His descriptions were exaggerated, and proved an excellent example of the use of disinformation.

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Although it is not clear what motivated Church, neither does it matter. The letter never reached Boston.

Church sent the cipher along with a young lady who was traveling to British lines. However, she was intercepted by a rebel patrol, and relinquished the letter. The patrol could not make out the cipher, and held onto it for a month. Finally realizing the probable importance of the message, they sent it to General Washington. After having it deciphered, Washington ordered the young lady arrested. She broke under questioning, and Church was picked up.

In a war council, Church was able to convince no one of his intention to deceive the British, and he was thrown in jail. He was held first in Connecticut; then in Boston, after it was retaken from the British, he was held in town-arrest. Late in 1777, given a choice between continued town-arrest or the opportunity to begin his life anew, Church boarded a schooner for the West Indies. The schooner was never heard from again.

□ □ □

Church's importance to the British cannot be overstated. Nor can the mystery surrounding his role as a spy. Why, when he was prosperous and respected among the colonists, did he turn? Or was it a turning; was his role perhaps always that of a spy, one who was reared to fit within the locale of his eventual espionage? Was he committed to a cause, or was it the money? Is it possible that he was protecting himself; regardless of the outcome of the war, he would be victorious no matter which side was the winner? History answers none of these questions. Church, the convicted spy, remains a mystery. †

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The Spy On The Seaway

by Edward D. Hoch

For all of his eccentricities, my friend Simon Ark was a man of dignity. I'd never seen him so angry as that November afternoon when he first told me about the impostor. Someone using his name had been interviewed by the weather girl on a small Canadian television station.

"My friend," he said, "this man has made the name of Simon Ark a laughingstock across Canada!"

"Hardly that, Simon. The station only has a limited range."

"But to be interviewed during the weather forecast? Does the man have no dignity?"

"Maybe your friend who phoned you was mistaken. You didn't actually see it yourself. Besides, who believes weather forecasts?"

"Will you fly there with me while I confront this impostor?"

Banford, Ontario, was just over an hour away from New York by plane, along the St. Lawrence Seaway. I figured we could fly up there and back the same day without my wife Shelly even knowing I was gone from my desk at *Neptune Books*. But when a check of schedules revealed that an overnight stay would be necessary, she was surprisingly agreeable.

"Why would anyone want to impersonate Simon Ark?" she wondered, with a touch of sarcasm. "Isn't one of them enough — going around with that story that he's been searching for the devil for two thousand years?" I decided that question didn't really require an answer.

Banford was a medium-sized city of a quarter-million people, with three or four tall buildings dominating an otherwise nondescript skyline. I'd expected the studios of *Channel Six Television*

Illustration by Aries

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to be located in one of those buildings, but we found it on the outskirts of the city in a modern, two-story building, with its own parking lot in the rear. By the time we drove up in a taxi, the snow flurries that had greeted our airport arrival were collecting on the ground in earnest, adding to several inches already there.

"Do you usually get snow like this in November?" I asked the driver.

"Pretty regularly. They're predicting a couple of inches by midnight." The driver accepted his fare and tip with a grunt and drove off.

"What's the weather girl's name?" I asked Simon.

"Rosie Lane," he muttered distastefully.

It was five o'clock, and preparations were under way for the evening news at six. When a smiling Rosie Lane appeared in the lobby to usher us into her cluttered little office, its walls dotted with celebrity photographs and awards citations, she made it clear she had very little time to spend with either of us. She was short, blonde, and dynamic, with a face that no doubt photographed a decade younger than her thirty-odd years.

"You say you're the real Simon Ark. Can you prove it?"

He studied her a moment through half-closed eyes before replying. "My dear young lady, I don't have to prove it. Produce your impostor and I will expose him for the fraud he is."

She was obviously no match for authoritative grandfather-figures. Her unease was obvious and she shuffled a few papers on her desk. "You understand I'm not a news person. I do the weather segment of the show at six and eleven. It's called *Rosie Outside*, and we do it live in the back parking lot. Whatever it's doing — rain, snow, heat wave — I'm out there giving the weather. The viewers love it, especially when the weather's bad. Sometimes, on a slow news day, they let me come in and do a studio interview with someone connected with the weather — a farmer needing rain, a professor with a cloud-seeding plan, a ski resort owner in the winter."

"This false Simon Ark was weather-related?" I asked, somewhat surprised. "How?"

"Well, he came to me one day with this book he — or you — wrote about witchcraft. He wanted to talk about how magic was used through the ages to try controlling the weather. It was as likely a topic as any, and I hadn't done an interview spot in a couple of weeks. Your photo wasn't on the jacket. If it had been, he couldn't have fooled me. He looked nothing like you."

"When was this?"

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Before she could answer, a sad-faced young man stuck his head in the doorway. "It's snowing harder, Rosie," he announced.

"I can see that through the window, Greg."

"Weather Bureau just updated its forecast. Two to four inches by midnight."

"Great! I'll be out there at eleven o'clock and nobody'll see me through the snow!" When he'd gone she told us, "That's Greg Foxe, my producer. I think he wanted an excuse to see you. The station management is afraid you'll sue." She seemed to find the idea amusing.

"Perhaps I will," Simon assured her. "My reputation has certainly been damaged."

"To get back to our conversation . . . I interviewed this Ark person two weeks ago Monday. We have a tape if you want to see it. Let's look at it and then you can decide about suing."

She took us into an unused conference room, stopping on the way to pick up a boxed television tape. After inserting it into the player on top of the monitor, she pushed a few buttons and we settled back to watch. "I'll advance it to my segment," she said, skipping over the local news till the tape reached a shot of her dressed like an eskimo, standing shin-deep in snow.

Her delivery of the weather report was more entertaining than knowledgeable, but apparently it was what the audience in Banford wanted. When it ended, they cut to a commercial and then returned to find Rosie in a studio chair, without her eskimo coat, facing a fat, bearded man who looked nothing like Simon. The Arkian impostor launched into a lecture on magical incantations to change the weather, starting with maypoles and Indian rain dances. Rosie Lane cut him off after two minutes, and the show switched to sports news.

"You going to sue us over that?" she asked with a smile.

"The man knows next to nothing," Simon scoffed. "Maypoles are certainly vestiges of nature-worship, but they have nothing to do with changing the weather. Do you have his address, where we can reach him?"

"I have a phone number." She handed him a slip of paper. "But you can see for yourself that he did you no harm. If anything, he helped promote your book."

"The book is out of print," I interjected. As Simon's editor, I knew it all too well. "But the whole interview seemed like a satire."

"I'll phone the man," Simon decided. "At the very least he deserves a good fright."

"You can use this telephone." She got to her feet. "Now if you'll

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excuse me, I have to prepare for the news. You're welcome to stay and watch, if you wish."

"Thanks," I said with a smile.

Simon made the call, and I listened to his end of the conversation. "Is this Mr. Ark — Mr. Simon Ark, the expert on all things magical and supernatural? ...Ah, I saw you recently on television, on the Channel Six weather show, and I wondered if we could talk...Meet with you?...Well, my friend and I are only in town overnight. But yes, I could meet with you. Right now we're at the Channel Six studios. Could you come down here?...Fine, fine... You don't need my name. We'll watch for you in the reception area."

When he'd hung up, I said, "He's coming here? I thought you were just going to scare him a little."

"It's better done in person, my friend. Let us go and wait. He said he lived only a few minutes away."

We sat in the outer lobby, next to some artificial plants, until the familiar bearded figure came around the corner of the building and opened the big glass door. He'd come from the direction of the parking lot, though we hadn't seen a car pull in. As he approached the vacant receptionist's desk next to the second floor stairway, Simon got to his feet like a cat about to pounce. "Mr. Ark, I believe? Simon Ark?"

The bearded man smiled, brushing a bit of snow from his coat. "That's me. You're the man I spoke to on the phone?"

"*I am the real Simon Ark*," Simon said in his most theatrical voice.

The impostor was undaunted. "Is that so? Are there two of us, then?" His face broke into a grin. "Maybe you're my father!"

"You are an impostor!" Simon fumed. "I intend to have the police on you!"

The man was still grinning, but I decided to step in before things became too heated. "I think he's kidding you, Simon. I think the whole thing's some sort of joke."

"I can establish my identity," the bearded man persisted. "That weather girl, Rosie Lane, will tell you I'm Simon Ark."

I thought Simon might actually punch him then, but there was an interruption. Producer Greg Foxe appeared in the studio doorway.

"Rosie says you might want to watch the show. You'd better get in here if you do. We go on in five minutes."

"All right," Simon Ark said.

It wasn't until we started to follow along the hallway to the studio that I turned to see whether the false Simon Ark was coming along. He was nowhere in sight.

"Simon," I said, "he's slipped

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away."

"Who has?" Greg Foxe asked.

"That man we were talking to in the lobby."

Foxe frowned at us. "There was no man with you just now. You were alone out there."

The whole thing was beginning to take on the aspects of Wonderland, but there was no more time to question Foxe before we were ushered into the studio and warned to keep silent. It was a large, high-ceilinged room, with the set for the news show in one small corner. While a pair of cameras focused on it now, and the anchorman took his position behind a desk, it was obvious that the single studio was used for several other shows during the course of the day. There was a kitchen set in the opposite corner, and a painted skyline along one wall. Two chairs for interview segments were also nearby.

"Let's go," Foxe said, crouching with his clipboard beneath one camera. I could see the monitor from where I stood, and a commercial for a meat tenderizer was suddenly replaced by the scene before my eyes. The six o'clock news was on the air.

"Simon," I managed to whisper, "what happened to the impostor? Did we imagine the whole thing?"

"Hardly," he whispered back. "Mr. Foxe has some motive for lying about it. The truth will become obvious in time."

"But he just seemed to disappear!"

"He might have slipped upstairs. There was no receptionist to prevent it."

"Then he may still be in the building." Though the impostor hadn't seemed especially threatening at the time, I didn't like the idea of him sneaking around unseen.

The snow had turned into a heavy, steady fall by the time Rosie Lane's weather segment came on at 6:15. One of the two cameras was moved to the back door of the studio while Rosie, wearing her familiar fur parka, came in from behind us and picked up a yardstick she used as a pointer.

"Here we are," she announced cheerfully as the *Rosie Outside* logo came on the screen over her smiling face. She pointed out a few weather factors on a large studio map of Canada and the northern United States, then let the camera follow her outside. "As you can see, it's snowing hard at our studio — so hard, in fact, that you can probably barely see me. The cause of all this snow, which will bring more than four inches by midnight, is that strong low pressure system centered

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over James Bay. It'll be with us for the next forty-eight hours, so don't look for any improvement before the weekend. Until then, try to enjoy it!" She made a quick snowball and threw it in the general direction of the camera.

I could see Greg Foxe in the doorway, signaling her to speed it up. She dipped her yardstick into the snow, saying, "Snow depth total at our studio right now is — " She stopped in mid-sentence as the stick failed to penetrate more than an inch or so. Then Rosie bent and brushed away the snow as the camera zoomed in on the mound for a close-up. We heard her scream as a bloody face was uncovered. Instantly, the screen went blank and a commerical for dog food came on.

In the studio, everyone moved toward the door. Rosie, half supported by Greg Foxe, steadied herself against one of the cameras. "It's a body," she said, her voice verging on hysteria. "There's a dead man in the snow. I think he's been murdered."

The local police came quickly, while handsome anchorman Phil Chandler explained to viewers that a body had been discovered and they'd have full details at eleven o'clock. Chief among the police was a dark-haired detective sergeant named Asher, who seemed less than awed by the television personalities around him.

"Where's Proquill? the station manager," he asked Foxe. "Why isn't he down here?"

"Probably gone home," the cameraman volunteered. His name was Seth Hamlin and he'd been shooting Rosie when she uncovered the body.

"That's right," Foxe agreed. "I saw him just before six with his coat on."

"Anyone know who the dead man is?" Sergeant Asher asked.

It was Phil Chandler, the anchorman, who spoke. "I recognize him. His name's Ronald McGregor. I interviewed him once. He's a maritime insurance agent. His firm insures many of the ocean-going cargo ships that sail from Great Lakes ports and up the St. Lawrence Seaway."

Asher frowned. "Any idea what brought him here?"

"None whatever."

"Are there any strange cars in your parking lot?"

Chandler shrugged and took out a pack of cigarettes. "Hard to tell with all that snow on them."

The detective turned his attention to us, next, and Simon explained the purpose for our mission. Asher scratched his head and asked, "You came all the way up here for that?"

"Would you want someone going around impersonating you,

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Sergeant?"

"He didn't do you any harm, did he?"

"No," Simon admitted.

"How'd you hear about it?"

"An acquaintance in Niagara Falls heard about the show from a friend. He wrote me a letter."

"Did you know the murdered man?"

We both said no, and Asher went on to question Rosie Lane. She was still a bit shaken from her discovery, but she told what had happened in a matter-of-fact manner. After viewing a tape of the news broadcast, Asher sought out Seth Hamlin, the cameraman.

"I see on the tape that you zoomed in when Rosie bent over to brush the snow away, almost as if you knew what was under it."

Hamlin, a burly young man with a shaggy mustache and a rock star T-shirt, shook his head. "If I'd have known there was a body in the snow, I'd have pulled way back. Maybe then they'd have left me on for another ten seconds before cutting to a commercial. It was the gore that scared the director."

"That you?" the detective asked Greg Foxe.

"I'm the producer. I work out here. The director is Hank Tabooth. He was in the control room."

Tabooth was an older man with thinning hair, who'd been standing nearby. "As soon as I saw that body, I threw the switch," he confirmed. "My first thought was that it was a joke of some sort. Rosie likes jokes and sometimes they get back at her. But I couldn't wait to find out. I figured, whatever it was, it didn't belong on the six o'clock news."

The medical examiner came in to report to Asher that the dead man had been stabbed through the heart with a thin, sharp knife of some sort. He promised more information after he'd performed an autopsy. Asher asked about the approximate time of death. "It's difficult to tell, with the body in the snow like that. Obviously, the body temperature would drop more rapidly than if it were inside. The autopsy might tell us how long he lived after he last ate a meal."

"Take a rough guess, Doc," the sergeant suggested.

"A rough guess? One hour, maybe a little less."

"All right, that's good enough for now." He faced the reporters, cameramen, director, producer and other technicians. "How many of you, besides Chandler here, knew the dead man?" When nobody stepped forward, he said, "Come on! He was on the show once. Somebody must remember him."

"What did you say his name was?" Seth Hamlin asked.

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"McGregor. Ronald McGregor."

"I knew him a little," Hamlin admitted. "I just didn't recognize him there."

Foxe and Tabooth and even Rosie Lane all admitted they remembered his appearance on the show, some months earlier, when he was interviewed. "What was he interviewed for?" Sergeant Asher asked. "What did he do?"

Chandler and Foxe exchanged glances and then the anchorman replied. "There've been rumors of arms shipments bound for certain West African nations."

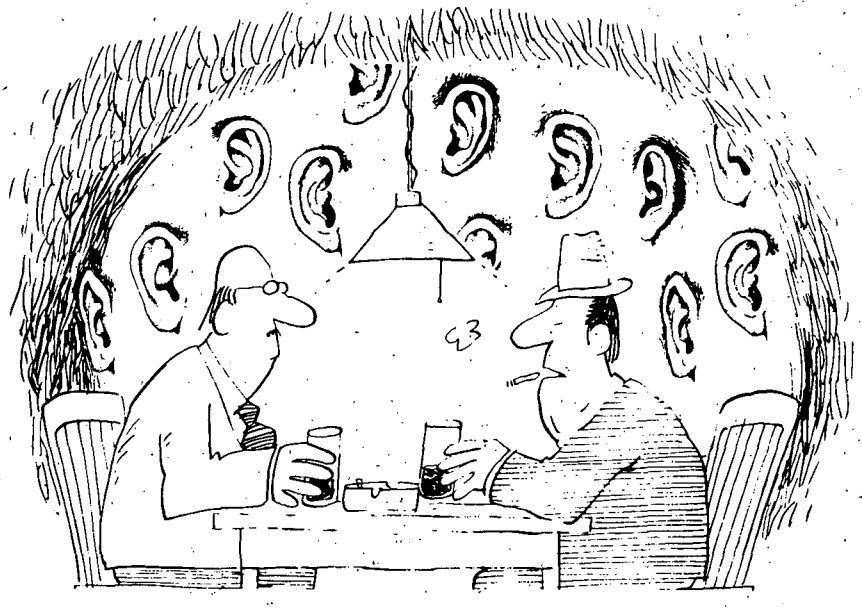
The detective looked surprised. "Up the Seaway?" Then he seemed to remember. "I did read something about it. The American CIA was supposed to be using small ocean-going freighters sailing from Great Lakes ports, to avoid suspicion."

"McGregor seemed a logical one to question, since he's supposed to inspect the cargo he insures, but he denied any knowledge of arms shipments. The story faded out of the news without ever being confirmed."

"And why was he here tonight?"

"I have no idea." Chandler replied.

It was an hour later, after eight



"Careful what you say . . . the walls have ears."

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o'clock, before Simon managed to get Rosie aside for some questioning of his own. But his prime interest wasn't the body in the snow. He was still obsessed with the impostor who'd used his name. "I've called that number again and no one answers," he told her.

The weather girl shrugged. "He's probably out."

"You must have his address."

"No, only his phone number."

"You realize he was here just before six o'clock. We saw him enter from around the back of the building. He might have seen the killer in the parking lot. He might even *be* the killer."

"That's impossible," she said firmly. "He's not involved."

"We spoke with the impostor in the reception area. A moment later, your producer swore we'd been alone."

"I know nothing about that."

"I want the truth, Miss Lane."

"That is the truth."

"I mean about the impostor. I know who he is, of course. And I can surmise that the entire thing was meant as a joke."

"How did you — ?"

"They tell me you like to play jokes, and I suppose the Simon Ark interview was one of them. But why did you decide upon the station manager, Mr. Proquill, to take my part?"

"You know that? I'm beginning to think you really are some sort of wizard!"

"I only look and listen, Miss Lane. You had me phone the impostor at that number and he said he lived quite close. He was close indeed — in his office on the second floor of this very building. We saw him walk around from the parking lot even though we didn't see a car driving in. In truth, he'd come down the stairs and gone out the back door, pretending he'd just parked his car. We were still with him when Greg Foxe poked his head out to tell us the news was starting. A moment later, he swore we'd been alone. That baffled me — had we been talking to an invisible man? But then, after the murder, someone asked about Proquill and Foxe said he'd gone home, that he'd seen him with his coat on just before six. I heard that, and remembered our conversation with the impostor. Greg Foxe looked out and saw us waiting, saw the station manager walking by as if on his way home, and thought we were alone. Conclusion — Proquill must be the impostor, and since everyone here must know the station manager, the whole Simon Ark interview had to be a joke."

Rosie Lane sighed. "You're right, of course. It was a slow news day and we needed an interview. I've used Proquill for these

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spots before — once he pretended to be a movie director shooting a film in town — and most of our regular viewers are in on the joke. I thought you'd catch on when I showed you the tape, but you believed the whole thing. He was just being dull, talking in circles without making sense. Our only mistake was in using your name. I saw it on that old book and thought you were probably dead by now. I didn't mean any harm."

"I'm very much alive," Simon insisted, "and you did a great deal of harm." We'd been talking in the corridor outside the studio, and now Sergeant Asher joined us from outside, brushing the snow from his coat. "It's still coming down out there. Miss Lane, I've been checking the cars in the parking lot, trying to determine if one of them belonged to the dead man. There's a powder blue Lincoln parked in the spot designated for *Station Manager*. Would that be Mr. Proquill?"

Rosie Lane looked surprised. "Yes, but I thought he'd gone home. He's certainly not here."

"Your producer's been trying to phone him ever since this happened, but no one answers at his home. Could you show me his office?"

She led the way up the stairs in the reception area while Asher followed and Simon and I trailed along. At the top we could hear a television set playing somewhere down the hall. "That's his office," she said. "He must still be there!"

As we reached the doorway and crowded inside, we saw the bearded man slumped across his desk. Asher hurried to the body and felt for a pulse, but we could see the blood on the desktop and we knew he was dead. If Simon had lived two thousand years, his imposter hadn't lasted long at all.

The double murder at the television station had thrown the place into a turmoil. While the body in the parking lot could be viewed objectively as a news item by Phil Chandler and the rest of the TV news team, the killing of their station manager seemed to bring the crimes home to them. There was little talk of an outsider now. One of the station's own staff seemed responsible.

"Dead a couple of hours," the medical examiner said. "Is that all now or do you have some more bodies hidden around here someplace?"

"That's all," Sergeant Asher said. "I hope."

Simon Ark and I had suddenly become very important to the investigation. We were the last ones known to have spoken with the dead man, and we could state positively that he was alive at five minutes to six. Greg Foxe con-

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firmed it. "I saw him walking through the lobby and thought he was leaving for home."

"Was he heading toward the door or the stairway to his office?"

"I just caught a glimpse of him when I spoke to these gentlemen. I thought he was leaving, but the stairs are right there, too. He could have gone up."

"He must have," I said. "He seemed to vanish in an instant. If he'd gone outside we'd have seen him through the glass door."

"The television set was on in his office," Asher told Foxe. "Was that ordinary?"

"He always watched our six o'clock news if he was working late."

"Looks as if he was stabbed with the same weapon that killed McGregor, judging by the size of the wound. Any idea what it was?"

Foxe shook his head. "We have a kitchen set downstairs for our noontime cooking show. There are some knives in a rack."

"Let's take a look," the detective said.

Simon and I followed along. The set I'd noticed earlier did indeed have a knife rack, with some wicked-looking blades. One slot was obviously empty. "A fillet knife," the producer told us. "It has a thin blade about seven inches long."

"That's probably the one," Asher agreed. "All the more evidence of an inside job. I want a list of everyone who was in this building at six o'clock."

"That's easy enough. We're all still here now, and you already have our names."

"What about the upstairs offices?"

"They all go home at five, including our receptionist. Sid Proquill's the only one who ever stayed late."

Asher started going over the list. "Producer, director, control room personnel, two cameramen, anchorman, weather girl. What about the sports guy?"

"He's home in bed with the flu. Phil Chandler read the sports scores."

"Isn't there a news director around?"

"He's on a story, too."

"Make-up?"

"One of the secretaries did Phil before she went home. Rosie handles her own. This isn't New York or Toronto, you know."

"I know," Asher muttered. "What about lighting?"

"It's handled from the control room. The union lets us do it that way on the evening news shows."

"Just these people," Asher mused, then turned to Simon and me. "Plus you two, of course."

"What motive could we have for killing a man we didn't even

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know?" Simon asked.

"McGregor? I don't know about him. But you might have killed Proquill because he'd impersonated you. People have been killed for less."

We were left alone again as Asher went off to contact the families of the two dead men. As we settled down to wait for further developments, I asked, "What do you think about it, Simon? Are we involved in any way? Did our coming here trigger these killings?"

"I doubt it," he responded. "Our arrival was probably no more than an unfortunate coincidence."

The station was playing the regular network programming from the Canadian Broadcasting Company, and prime-time activity in the studio itself was at a minimum. Only Seth Hamlin was there, fixing something on the base of the camera. "I have to move it to the doorway again at 11:15," he explained, "to televise Rosie's forecast. One of the casters has been sticking."

"The eleven o'clock show has the same format?" Simon asked.

"Pretty much. A bit more national news from around Canada, late hockey scores and such, but many of the early feature stories are repeated on tape. The weather's live again, of course. They love to see Rosie out in the snow."

"It's still coming down," I observed. Hamlin finished his work and went out for a cup of coffee before air time.

I was getting edgy about sitting around in the empty studio with a killer on the prowl, but Simon made light of my fears. He was anxious to wait until Sergeant Asher returned from talking with the families. Meanwhile, the bodies had been removed, but two detectives remained on guard, questioning the television crew about their movements earlier. We could hear them in the control room talking to Hank Tabooth, who assured them everyone had been in his proper position during the news.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Asher finally returned looking deeply troubled. Phil Chandler insisted on taping an interview with him to open the eleven o'clock news, and they ran quickly through it with only minutes to spare. The lights on the news set were going on and I wondered where Rosie Lane was. Freshening her make-up perhaps, or checking the latest radar reading from the airport.

Simon managed to get Asher aside and asked, "What's the trouble?"

"We may have a motive, but it's not for publication yet. McGregor's sister told me he was

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involved with the Americans, with the CIA."

"Working for them?"

"Not exactly, not at first. She says when he was interviewed by the station he was approached by someone here about supplying cargo data for various ships using the Seaway."

"They wanted to know about arms shipments?"

"Apparently. Especially on ships bound for the west coast of Africa, just as Chandler said. I've been on the phone to someone in Washington and this thing could be of major importance. In the past six months, two tramp steamers carrying secret arms shipments have been seized by Nigerian pirates. Such pirate attacks are not uncommon off Africa, South America and the East Indies, but this seems to indicate they're part of a broader plan. Both ships sailed from Great Lakes ports. They think someone discovered the cargo and passed the word on to a foreign government."

"Someone at this station?" I asked, dumbfounded.

"It's certainly possible."

"Where does Proquill fit in?" Simon Ark wanted to know.

"McGregor's sister thinks her brother came to Proquill today to tell him about this employee's activities. I gather the Canadian and American governments both wanted McGregor to play along, somewhat like a double agent, but he was having none of it."

Simon nodded sadly. "I begin to get a clearer picture of what must have happened."

Greg Foxe came over to us. "Quiet, please. We're on the air in ten seconds." I saw Rosie duck into the dressing room.

Phil Chandler opened the program with a first-hand account of the double murder at the station, including the taped interview with Asher. Chandler reported it all in properly somber tones. During the commercial break, Seth Hamlin began to move his camera to the studio's back door, as he had during the earlier newscast. Rosie Lane emerged from the little dressing room, wearing the same fur parka. The snow outside had diminished to flurries, though it was still blowing around a bit.

Rosie passed us and tried to smile. "No bodies this time!"

She ran through the weather forecast quickly and a bit nervously, never alluding to the body she'd found earlier. While she spoke, I noticed Simon Ark huddling with Sergeant Asher. At the end of the segment, they cut to a commercial and Hamlin rolled his camera back inside, positioning it for the upcoming sports segment.

Rosie shucked her parka and asked, "How'd I do?"

"You were fine," I told her.

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"I was nervous as hell, expecting another body to rise up out of the snow."

When the news ended, Sergeant Asher called everyone together and made a statement. "I believe we've just about wrapped up the case, folks. I have information that McGregor was peddling information on arms shipments to a foreign government. We think he was working with your station manager, putting together what data they collected separately about cargo ships using the Seaway. Somehow they had a falling-out tonight and McGregor stabbed him with that kitchen knife from the set. But before he died, Sid Proquill wounded McGregor, too. He staggered downstairs and died in the parking lot. If this theory is correct, the murder weapon would be in the snow where McGregor's body was found, since it wasn't upstairs in Proquill's office. We'll start searching for it first thing in the morning, and if we find it, that'll be the clincher."

"I'll have a camera crew on duty to film the search," Phil Chandler said.

Asher decided everyone could go home, and by midnight they'd all drifted out. As he was leaving, Foxe said, "The St. Lawrence freezes over every winter. With this weather we've been having the shipping season's just about over."

"My thought exactly," Simon agreed.

We left with Asher and pulled away in his unmarked car. "Circle the block and we'll approach on foot," Simon suggested.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Quiet, my friend. We'll explain in due time."

We parked a block away from the TV station, out of reach of the streetlights, and I followed them through the snowy darkness. At the parking lot, we crouched and waited. After some ten minutes, Asher gave a shout and his flashlight went on. Then Simon moved as I followed.

It was Rosie Lane, of course, and Asher already had the handcuffs on her when we reached them. "The knife's right there," he said, pointing to a slender break in the snow's surface. "I saw her drop it in."

Simon Ark stared at her. "I see stormy weather in your forecast, Miss Lane."

She looked down at her handcuffed wrists and said, "I want a lawyer."

Simon Ark sat on an uncomfortable-looking chair at Police Headquarters and explained his reasoning, for Asher's benefit and my own. "I told the Sergeant to say what he did, about suspecting McGregor

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and wanting to search for the knife. I hoped the real killer wouldn't be able to resist taking the knife from its hiding place and dropping it in the snow. Of course it couldn't have happened as Sergeant Asher said, because we saw Rosie's yardstick go down about an inch in the snow before it hit the body. If McGregor had killed Sid Proquill after we saw him at five minutes to six, and before she found the body at 6:15, it would have been barely covered with snow. The snow was falling fast, but not an inch in fifteen minutes. Also, of course, if McGregor had come to the station to kill anyone, he'd have brought his own weapon, not risked stealing a knife from a studio set."

"But you knew it was Rosie Lane, didn't you?" the detective said.

"I was fairly certain," Simon agreed. "In your faked solution, you suggested that McGregor and the station manager were working together spying on cargo ships using the Seaway, but we know that Seaway shipping closes down for the winter because of the freeze. Wasn't it far more likely that McGregor might have been working with Rosie Lane, the weather girl? She could make a pretty good prediction, based upon prior years, as to when the last ship would get through. If the important arms shipments had to be diverted to an Atlantic port, she'd know it. The key to the murders, however — especially Proquill's murder — hinged upon the time element. He was alive at 5:55 because we spoke with him, but he was dead by 6:15 —"

"Wait a minute," Asher challenged. "How do you know that?"

"The television set in his office was on. If he'd been alive at 6:15, when Rosie found the body in the snow right on camera, he certainly would have left his office and rushed downstairs. He was the station manager, after all."

"Go on."

"Everyone in the building at the time was connected with the news, and you established that they were all at their proper posts. Tabooth and his people were in the control room, Foxe and Chandler were in plain sight of us all, and certainly both cameramen were at their cameras. But Rosie Lane? She only appeared on the set, dressed in her parka, just before the weather segment. None of us saw her until approximately 6:15. Supposedly, she was in the make-up room, but you'll remember, my friend, that during the six o'clock show she didn't come out that door. She walked into the studio from behind us. Only Rosie Lane, of all the people there, was unaccounted for between 5:55 and 6:15. Only she

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had an opportunity to kill Proquill."

"What about the possibility of an outside killer?" I asked.

"You're forgetting the missing knife from the kitchen set. Of course it's possible a killer from the outside entered without being seen and stabbed them both with a knife identical to the missing one, but it's highly unlikely. I had to make certain, though, which is why I had Asher arrange his little trap."

But it was not till much later that night, when Rosie Lane finally made a statement, that we learned the exact motive for the crimes. "She has a lover at the Hungarian embassy in Ottawa," Asher reported. "He's the one got her into it, and then she recruited McGregor when he was interviewed on the program. She was mainly supplying weather reports and predictions on when the Seaway would close for the winter. McGregor was supposed to gather information on cargoes, but he contacted the Canadian government instead. The CIA figured it was part of a network supplying information about arms shipments to these pirate gangs operating off the coast of West Africa. Anyway, McGregor wanted out and he told Proquill what she was doing. She came upon McGregor behind the building a little before six, and stabbed him with that knife. She and Proquill were playing their impersonation game with me, and he went along with that, but afterward, when he phoned down to Rosie, he mentioned about McGregor's visit. She says he laughed off the whole spy business, not believing it for a minute, but by that time she'd already killed McGregor so she had to kill Proquill, too, before the body was found. She had ten minutes to run upstairs, stab him, and get back down for the show."

"But why did she uncover the body?" I asked.

"She thought it would divert suspicion from herself and confuse the timing of the two murders enough to give her an alibi."

We left Banford the following morning, as word came that the Canadian government was taking steps to expel a Hungarian diplomat for espionage activities. It had not been one of Simon Ark's happier journeys, as he had begun to feel that the tensions of our arrival might have propelled Rosie Lane into her irreversible acts of violence.

"Perhaps next time I shall leave any impostor to his own devices," Simon said, as our plane took off for New York.

I glanced out the window at the cloudless sky. "And next time we'll know better than to believe the weather forecast!" †

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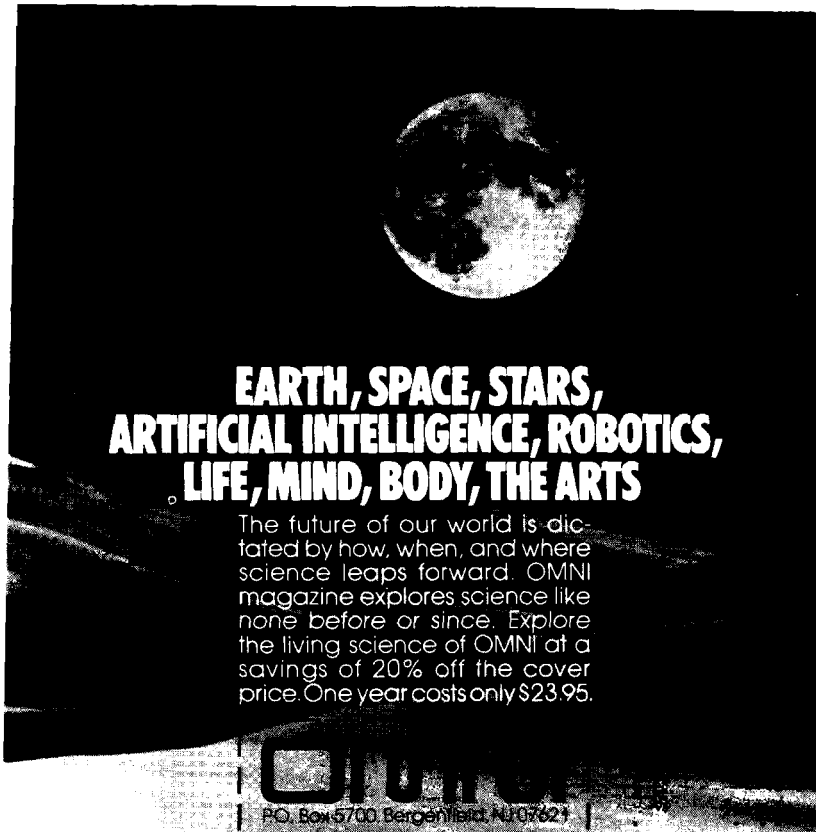

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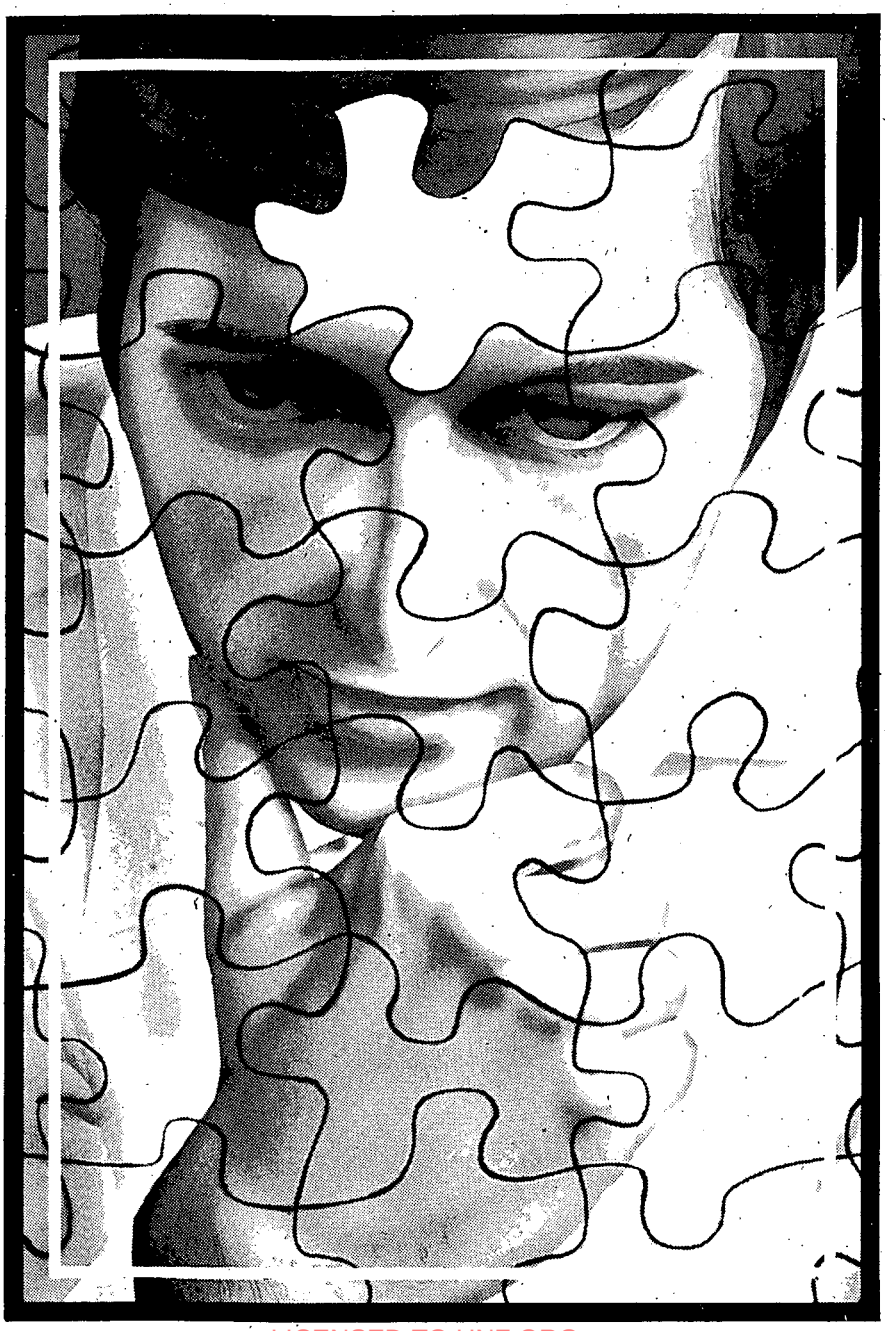

Illustration by Bruce Baker

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HAGAN?

by Jack Gerson

The teashop was of the old-fashioned variety. Indeed, it might have been a relic of that Brighton of fifty years ago as immortalized by Graham Greene. Even Gloria, the solitary waitress on duty, wore the starched white apron and small segment of white lace cap. It actually amused Gloria who, when not working as a waitress, was an actress of modest but definite talent, and considered herself to be playing a character role in some period play. At least when the customers were not being difficult.

Gloria White, whose real name was, in fact, Jean Black, was a girl of some susceptibilities, a woman who was easily concerned about the plight of the human race, or the quandary of the stray cat looking for a home. Probably both in equal measure. This was important, as it made her involvement in what was to follow inevitable. And it must not be thought that Gloria was a naive child. She admitted to twenty-nine and was actually thirty-three.

The customer, who might have been in his late thirties, provided the immediate cause for concern. He had been sitting over a cup of cold coffee for nearly two hours. He was, indeed, at that moment, the last of the morning customers. Outside, the city of Brighton known sometimes as London-By-The-Sea, was shrouded in a thin mist of rain which had swept in from the English Channel. It could be presumed that the man was sheltering from that very rain.

Yet it did not account for the fact that, for the last half hour, the man, dressed in a crumpled raincoat, had been sitting with his head in his hands. The attitude was one of despair. Gloria was concerned.

"Excuse me, sir," she said, approaching the corner table

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with a tentative step. "But, are you feeling all right?"

The man looked up. The face was yellow, a kind of unhealthy tan under which were lines of concern and weariness. Even of pain.

"Wha' did you say?" The voice was slurred slightly but not, Gloria was sure, with drink.

"I asked if you were feeling all right?"

There was a pause. As if he needed time to pull himself together. Then he said, "They've been trying to kill me. Twice."

Gloria gulped. The man looked normal enough but one never knew.

"Once at London airport and once on the train down here to Brighton." The man went on, staring at her. "Of course you won't believe me..."

Gloria's first inclination was to agree that she didn't believe him. But there was something in his face, a look, not so much of fear as of genuine bewilderment, that convinced her at once that he was telling the truth. Of course, she wanted to be convinced. She looked around the empty tearoom. The manageress, Miss Fortmason, of the iron glance, was in the kitchen eating her own lunch and therefore no threat. Gloria sat facing her customer.

"I believe you," she said, kindly.

He wouldn't leave it there. He went on. "And I'm no longer certain who I am."

"What do you mean?" she asked. The question was inevitable.

"Well," the man said, and his tone was almost mechanical, "my name is Hagan. John Hagan. I live at thirty-eight Mafeking Terrace. That's at the Hove end of Brighton."

"I know it," said the girl.

"If you knew it well enough, you'd find, as I did this morning, that number thirty-eight doesn't exist. It's a vacant lot. Oh, the neighbour, Mrs. Manson, says there was a house there once but it burned down ten years ago."

Gloria frowned. There were difficulties now in belief.

"But I lived there two years ago," John Hagan insisted. "With my wife, Edith. Edith Hagan. Lived there with me. And I knew Mrs. Manson as my neighbour. Oh, she said she didn't

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know me from Adam, but I knew of her. I mean, I knew her name. But then I would. She was my neighbour."

He gave a small definite nod, as if to reassure himself. Gloria, who sat now enthralled, returned the nod as an enticement for him to continue.

"My neighbour across the road was a man called Hastings. I saw him, too. And he purported not to recognize me. But after all, I was only away for two years."

"Where were you?"

"I...I was working abroad. In Germany." Hagan replied without hesitation.

It was believable. These days, Gloria told herself, many people worked abroad in the Common Market countries.

"It's like a conspiracy," Hagan said, after a short pause. "And what's happened to my wife? To Edith?"

Gloria would, if pressed, have to admit the wife part of his story interested her least. She would rather Hagan had been single. But she acknowledged his concern. And changed the subject.

"What do you do?" she asked. "What do you work at?"

"I'm a quantity surveyor."

"Oh! What does a quantity surveyor do?"

"Look, it's not important. What's important is what's happening to me. As I come out of London airport...a man tries to shoot me."

"Didn't that create a disturbance?"

"He used a revolver with a silencer." Hagan indicated a small hole in a loose flap of his coat. "Nobody heard. And he missed, thank God!"

The hole in the coat lent some kind of conviction, Gloria told herself.

Hagan went on. "And the same man, and another, tried to throw me off the train coming down here. Tried to throw me off the *Brighton Belle*. Onto the track. At sixty miles an hour. Or more. Two men. Swarthy, Mediterranean types. Fortunately, the ticket collector came along. They...they had to desist. To stop. I stayed close to the ticket collector then. And I think I lost them at the railway station. I certainly hope so."

Gloria agreed. She hoped so, too. Two swarthy looking men

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bent on killing someone were not the usual clientele at the *Cosye Olde Englishe Tea-Shoppe*. Miss Fortmason would not approve.

"Where were you coming from?" she asked.

"West Germany. Bonn. I was working there."

"Quantity surveying?"

"Yes. A two-year contract. Look, do you think I'm going mad?"

"No. I don't think I do. I had an uncle who went mad, and he talked more sense than you."

The logic evaded him but he gave a small grateful smile. "I can prove who I am," he said, and produced from an inner pocket the familiar shape of a British passport. He handed it to her.

She opened it and saw that his name was indeed John Hagan, and he was a quantity surveyor from Brighton. There was also an exit stamp for West Germany. She flicked through the passport, wanting to show real interest. And she repeated her previous question, out of genuine curiosity and to keep the conversation going.

"What does a quantity surveyor do?"

"I haven't the foggiest idea," he replied automatically, and then frowned.

"That's funny," he went on. "I should know, shouldn't I? I mean, as I am one, I should know what I do. But I don't."

Gloria agreed it was funny. And something else took her eye. An entrance stamp on the passport dated two weeks before.

"You were out of Germany. You only came back in two weeks ago. Where were you?" She showed him the relevant stamps in the book. His frown deepened. His forehead became a delta of lines.

"I don't know. I don't remember being out of Germany. But the main thing is, what has happened to my wife? Is Edith in danger? Where is she?"

"What does she look like?"

He shrugged. "Pretty. Medium height. Her hair's not dark. But then it's not blonde. In-between. A few years younger than me."

"You said your neighbour said there'd been a fire. Maybe

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she was...in that?" Gloria was treading softly here.

The grim suggestion did not affect him. "The fire, the Manson woman said, was ten years ago. Edith and I were living there, in Mafeking Avenue, two years ago."

"But this Mrs. Manson...she's old?"

"Yes."

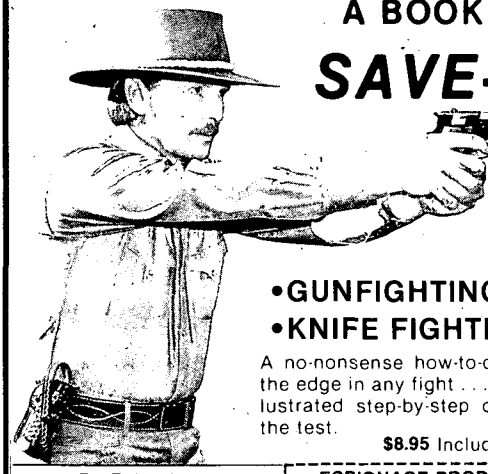
"Maybe she's just got her times mixed up. Maybe the fire was more recent. Like eighteen months ago."

"I suppose that's possible," he said, a drowning man clutching a fragment of flotsam. "But...but then, that would mean Edith was dead..."

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"I can't believe Edith is dead. So...so I can't feel any grief. But how could I find out...?"

Gloria looked at her Timex wristwatch. She never looked at it without thinking she would, someday, afford something



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Matt Braun is a former army officer and combat instructor who spent many years training troops and civilians in survival methods. Moreover, he's a survivor himself, and in terms you'll never forget, he reveals all the tricks of the trade.

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more expensive. But it was reliable. It kept time. "I finish in fifteen minutes. Half-day. Off until tomorrow. I could help."

Hagan looked at her bleakly. "How?"

"We could go along to the registrar's office. Check on whether anyone of your wife's name died within the last two years."

Brighton Registry Office was a part of the town council buildings. It had green walls and a polished wooden counter. And a youth of not more than twenty behind the counter. He looked as if his face had been sprayed with acne.

"Hatches, matches or dispatches?" he said, cheerfully.

Hagan gave him a bleak look.

"Just a joke," the young man went on, defensively. "You know, births, marriages or deaths. Which do you want?"

"I'm trying to find out if a friend of mine is still alive," Gloria explained, with a simpering smile. "She may have died in the last few years. Hagan is the name. Edith Hagan."

"You know, a year or so ago, that would have been difficult," said the young man. "But we've been computorised." He said it as if it was a medical operation and something to be proud of. "I'll just punch up Hagan on the computor. You'll want the death certificate? We have to make a small charge..."

"That's all right," Hagan said. "We'll pay. And while you're at it, I'd like a copy of a birth certificate. John Randolph Hagan. Thirty-seven years ago."

The young man disappeared and they waited.

"Why the birth certificate?" Gloria asked.

"The way things are, I may need it to prove I'm John Hagan."

"You've got your passport."

"Which tells me I left Germany for a week. I don't remember that. I'm a quantity surveyor, yet I haven't the foggiest idea of what a quantity surveyor does. Maybe I...I need my birth certificate to prove to myself I really exist."

"That's a daft thing to say."

"Yes, isn't it?"

They waited. Hagan paced up and down. After a few

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minutes, he broke the silence. "I *was* born in Brighton, y'know. I remember. Running across the beach...across the sand..."

"There's no sand on Brighton beach," Gloria said, without thought. "It's only shingle."

Hagan's brow went into its semi-permanent frown. "That's right," he said, slowly. "And that sand...all that sand...there was no sea there, either."

He stared into space, a puzzled man.

The young man returned. He had a perplexed expression on his face.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. I...I've got one thing." He produced a document, his perplexity deepening. "This is a photostat. Birth certificate, John Hagan. But about the other one, Edith Hagan, we've no record of any death certificate."

Hagan looked relieved. Or at least appeared to feel relieved. Gloria wasn't sure.

The young man went on. "I did come across one Hagan. In the computor. One death certificate. Funny, though..."

"What's funny?" Gloria asked.

"Same as that birth certificate. John Hagan. He died three years ago. August tenth. See, it's all here."

He produced another photostat. It was the death certificate of John Randolph Hagan.

Gloria couldn't understand why Hagan wanted to go to the cemetery. Perhaps, she thought, it was to convince himself of the truth of all they had learned. Perhaps it was a masochistic curiosity. As if the gravestone was more convincing than a photostat of a certificate.

It was Brighton's largest cemetery. After a talk with the custodian, and a brief consultation of the plan of the place, they were directed to the grave site.

A simple stone, in plain granite, it bore an equally simple inscription:

JOHN RANDOLPH HAGAN.
1949-1981

Gloria, standing beside him, could feel Hagan start to shiver. It wasn't ordinary shivering caused by the cold, but a nervous reaction, a thing of the mind.

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"Are you all right?" she asked.

"As well as can be expected, under the circumstances. Not every day a man is permitted to stand over his own grave."

Just then, the fragment of granite at the edge of the stone flew up into the air. It was followed by a sharp, cracking sound, like the loud snapping of a branch of wood. Gloria jumped.

"What was that?"

To her surprise, Hagan grabbed her and threw her onto the grass behind the stone. He flattened himself beside her.

"Keep your head down," he gasped.

A fragment of grass and earth flew into the air. There was a second cracking sound.

"Wha'...what is it?" Gloria mumbled, her head being thrust into the damp grass by his right hand.

"Third time. Shooting at me. Now you believe me."

"I...I believe you." The taste of grass in her mouth. "Can we call the police?"

"Difficult when we're lying in a cemetery behind a gravestone. We try for the open and we're dead."

Gloria felt indignation rise within her. "I don't want to be dead. Not yet. They've no right..."

"Then lie there, and don't move. Or not much. Just a little to let them think we're both still here."

He fumbled in his pockets and came out with a penknife. He opened it. The blade was about two and a half inches in length.

"You're going to stop whoever's shooting at us with that?" Gloria said, disbelieving.

"It's all I've got," he replied, again looking puzzled. "So, wait!"

He peeled off his raincoat and jacket, and rolled up his sleeves. She stared at his arms. Great weals, not long healed, ran down both arms.

"Where did you get those?" she asked, eyes wide.

He stared at the weals for a moment. "I don't know," he said, and turning away from her, he crawled on his elbows away from his own gravestone and disappeared into the taller grass.

She lay, waiting. For what, she did not know. He'd moved

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like some kind of commando, a man with experience in such activities. The quantity surveyor, who didn't know what a quantity surveyor did. The man whose gravestone she was sheltering behind.

Another shot rang out. This time it pinked the edge of the stone, sending tiny gravel chips over her body. She buried her face again in the damp grass.

And waited.

Lying in a cemetery in Brighton, while someone shot at her; this shouldn't be happening. Yet, it was. And only two hours before, she'd been an out-of-work actress, doubling as a waitress to earn a living. It should be happening in a film, the kind of movie she'd always wanted to star in. With Michael Caine. Or Paul Newman, or even Christopher Walken, whom she greatly admired. Instead, her leading man was this nervous stranger with the tanned, drawn face, the name of a dead man, and a penknife with which to attack the enemy.

Time passing. Rain trickling down under the collar of her coat. She moved, out of extreme discomfort, and then froze instantly, expecting another shot. It didn't come.

Fifteen minutes must have elapsed before she heard the shout. It was indistinct and she lay, unmoved. Then it was repeated.

"It's all right! You can come out now!" His voice, hoarse but distinct.

She looked up, tentatively, and saw him standing some thirty yards away, his arm around the neck of a small dark man. The penknife was at the man's throat. Standing awkwardly, a stabbing, cramping pain running down her right leg, she limped towards Hagan and his prisoner.

Close up, the prisoner was swarthy, with a small moustache, and protruding, frightened eyeballs.

"He...he was shooting at us?" Gloria gasped.

"No. He was the observer. That one was shooting at us," Hagan replied, indicating another gravestone, with a large granite angel, the shadow of whose wings spread over the body of a man lying in the grass clutching a rifle. Curious, Gloria moved towards the body. The throat had been cut and the man lay on his back, eyes embracing the sky.

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"You...you killed him?" she asked, suddenly afraid.

"Otherwise he would have killed us," Hagan replied.

"But...for God's sake...the police...we'll have to get the police. And...and what do we tell them?"

"I don't know," said Hagan, his semi-permanent, puzzled expression reappearing.

"There's no need to tell the police." The voice came from behind Gloria. She turned to face a tall man in a raglan coat and soft hat. Two men in raincoats stood on each side of the new arrival.

The raglan coat turned to Hagan. "Good afternoon, Torrance. I'm sorry we're late."

Hagan's frown deepened. "I'm John Hagan," he said. "I live at thirty-eight..."

"Thirty-eight Mafeking Terrace," the man took over. "Your wife is Edith Hagan, and you are a quantity surveyor..."

"You know all about him?" Gloria asked.

"We ought to," replied the man, whose name she later learned was Marsh. "We created him."

"What's that supposed to mean? And who is Torrance?"

"Later," said Marsh, and turned to his companions. "Clear up here. And take charge of Mister Hagan's prisoner." He looked the prisoner up and down. "A Libyan passport, I think. Probably with diplomatic immunity. Pity his friend had an accident and fell on a penknife."

At that moment, the sun came out.

An hour later, Gloria was sitting in the lounge of a suite in the Metropole Hotel. She had a pen in her hand and was signing an impressively official document. When she had finished, Marsh took the pen from her.

"You have now signed the *Official Secrets Act*. Which, means you can say nothing to anyone about today's events. You understand?"

"I'm not stupid. Where's Mister Hagan?"

"Being medically examined by our doctor. He'll be all right. And his name isn't Hagan. It's Torrance. William Torrance.

"You know he has been tortured?"

"He's got some pretty nasty scars on his arms."

"Done in Tripoli. He's been in Libya, not in Germany. That

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was his cover story. The Libyans caught him. Gave him a rough time, until he escaped."

"What was he doing in Libya?"

"You remember the siege of the Libyan Embassy in London early this year?"

"It was all over the papers."

"Made us feel rather fed up with the Libyan Colonel and his government. There is an opposition to Ghadafi, you know. Torrance was sent out to encourage that opposition. Did rather well, too, until he was caught. And pretty well after he was caught. You see, we'd given him another identity."

"John Hagan?"

"John Hagan. Always pick someone who actually existed. Someone about the right age, who died. Then you can get a passport that's quite genuine and build up a real identity. Although we did make a mistake about Mafeking Terrace. House burnt down too long ago. But we created, with Torrance, a perfectly believable character. Working in Germany, holidaying in North Africa."

Gloria stared up at Marsh, "But why is he still insisting ...?"

"On being Hagan? Our doctor's got his idea about that. To survive the torture, Torrance had to become Hagan. As those bastards did their work...and they are experts...the only way he could have survived was to really become John Hagan. His mind did that for him. So when he got back here, still believing he was Hagan, he came to pick up the strands of the identity we'd given him."

"But why did the Libyans still try to kill him?"

"He hadn't cracked under torture. They still weren't sure whether he was an agent or whether he was really Hagan. So they followed him. Probably decided either way they'd be best rid of him. They hadn't counted on Torrance's training. We do, unfortunately, teach people how to kill very effectively with very little. Like a penknife."

"Will he...will he be all right?" Gloria asked, unable to disguise the tremour in her voice.

"Oh, yes. A little time, a little rest, and the doctor assures me he'll be back to normal. You've been a great help, Miss White. Or do I call you Miss Black? We've been checking up in the last hour. We know all about you, your real name, your

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stage name, and your career."

She told herself she should be indignant, but she wasn't. The sense of relief, now that it was over, was too great. Except for a couple of details.

"Did I get a clean bill of health from your check-up?" she asked.

"Virgin white," he replied, smiling.

"God, not that! I should be so lucky. When...when this is all over...will...will Mister Torrance, will he remember being Hagan?"

"You mean, will he remember you? I shall make a point of reminding him, if he doesn't." Marsh said. "Now I think you can go home. He'll know the help you were. He'll come and see you. In time."

She stood up. "Why should you do that? I thought you people were all cold, hard. Like ice."

Marsh shrugged, still smiling. "There's so little romance in our profession these days."

At the door of the suite, she hesitated. One final point to make. "Last question. About Edith Hagan...?"

"She doesn't exist. Part of our cover story. All right?"

She nodded. It was all right. †

Did you know...

Thomas Jefferson is famed as the writer of the "Declaration of Independence," and as being responsible for the Louisiana Purchase. His contributions to architecture, science, and the arts rank him as a Renaissance man. However, what is considerably less well known is that he is the Father of American Cryptography, as well.

Before being elected our third President, Jefferson dabbled in ciphers and invented what he called his "wheel cipher." It was a simple device of 36 interchangeable and independent wheels strung together on the same axis, each wheel having its own jumbled alphabet. Messages were encrypted simply by turning the wheels until the message appeared, then sending off any sequence of letters found elsewhere on the wheel. It was simple and very, very effective. But Jefferson filed it away with his private papers.

In 1922, it was discovered in the Library of Congress, reviewed by experts, and the U.S. Navy has used the "Jefferson cipher" ever since with only minor modifications.

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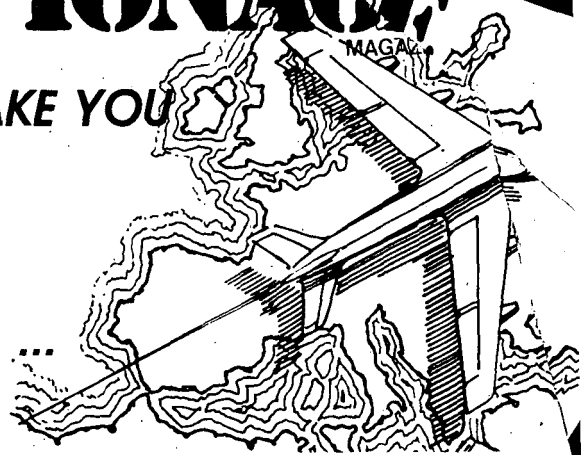

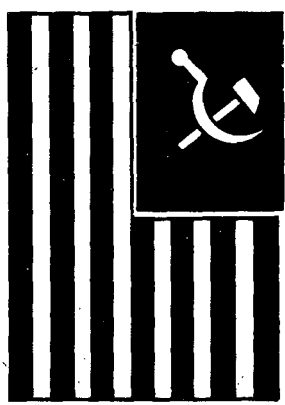

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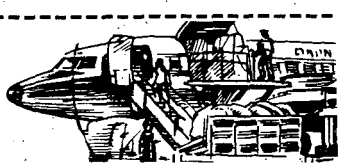

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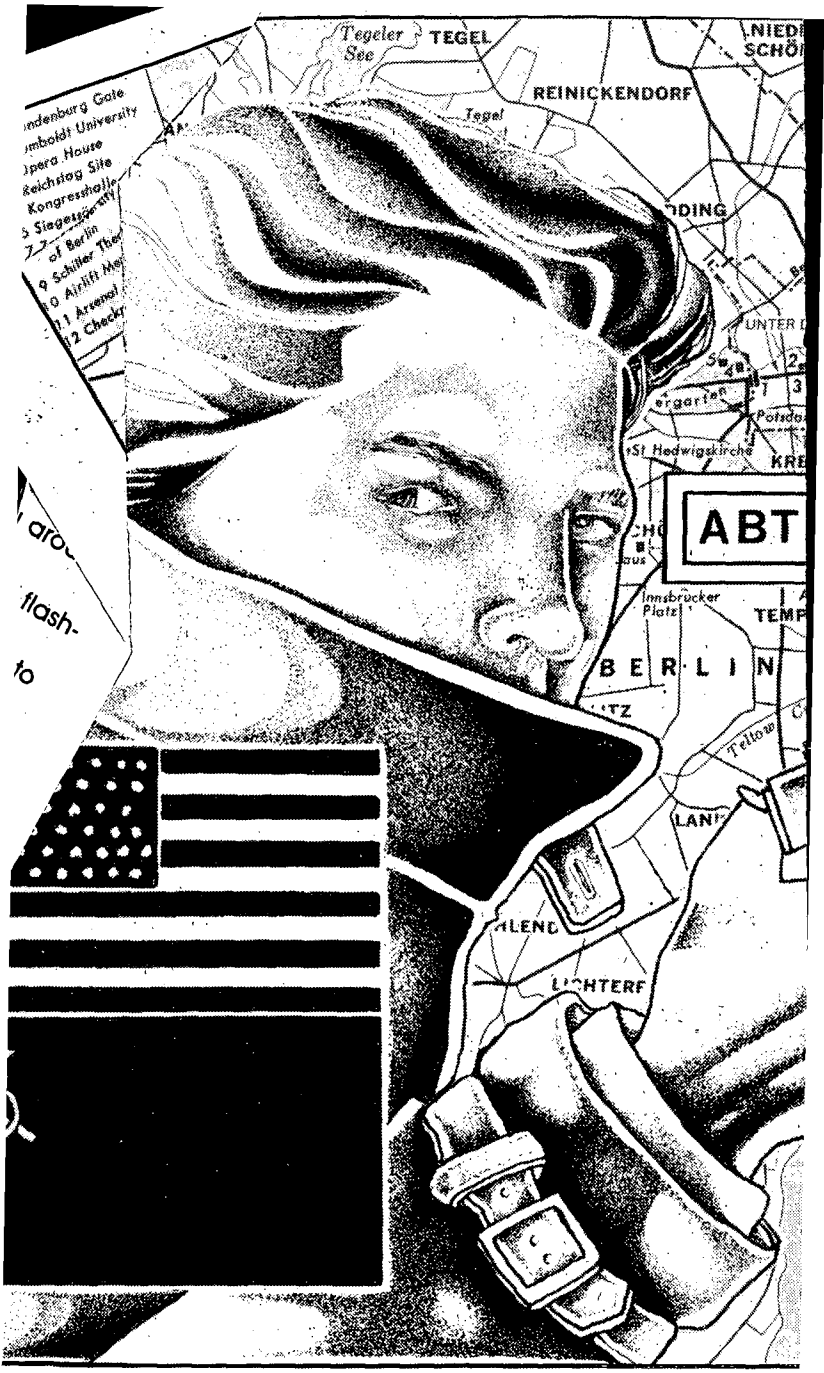

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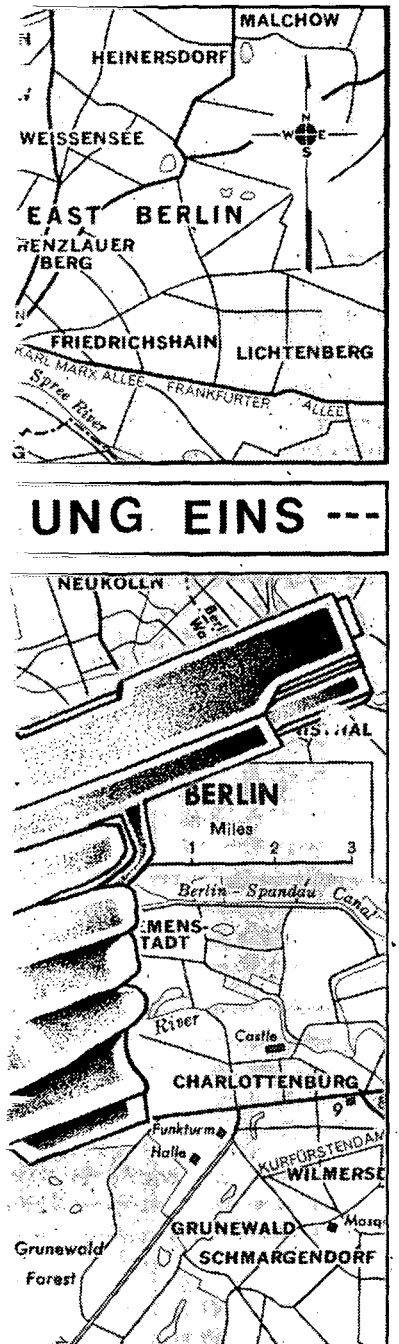

Illustration by Mike Romesburg

WALL GAME

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He met me as I came off the plane at the Tempelhof Airport and drove me to a bar in the Kurfurstendamm. Garry Charlton was quieter altogether, thinner, older-looking; but still the typical American – tall, loose-limbed, with a slow, deep voice. He had been noisy once, wilder. The change was obvious to me because I knew of the episode which had quenched the fire in him. I had even played a part in it.

When I had finished my beer, I dug in my pocket for my cigarettes. Then, remembering something, I left them where they were. I thought if I smoked it might remind Garry of Elizabeth. I wanted to forget her myself, but my mind kept going back to that day in the early sixties, when the Berlin temperature was minus three centigrade. The political atmosphere was colder still...

The border between West Berlin and the East Sector had been sealed. At the same time, the Bonn Government's intelligence organization, mostly British and American, was being badly pene-

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trated by the Russian K.G.B. with some disastrous results. Garry Charlton and I both said goodbye to friends whom we never saw again.

I remember quite vividly leaving the newsagent's near the Charlottenburg Station and seeing the shiny black saloon car outside the building in which the Charltons had their flat. It was near Garry's office, the U.S. Army civilian intelligence service, in G2.

Elizabeth Charlton was being pushed into the car by two men. Helped...or pushed? I could not be sure at that distance.

But I was quite sure it was Elizabeth. The red and black coat she wore was distinctive; I had told her as much only the evening before when I had met her and Garry at the theatre. One of the men was elderly. I could see tufts of grey-white hair under his black Homburg. The other man was hatless and seemed young.

I stood motionless for a time, wondering what to make of it. I had not seen either of the men before and thought I knew most of the Charltons' friends. Then, remembering my promise to Garry, I walked towards the black car. I got close enough to read its number-plate before it moved off slowly towards the Lietzensee Park area. I ran back to my own Volkswagen. The shiny black saloon was just a distant speck as I drove off in the same direction.

Garry Charlton had said, "I've got to leave Berlin for a few days. I would appreciate it if you'd keep an eye on Elizabeth while I'm away."

In the brief period I'd known her — she had not been married to Garry for very long — I'd formed the impression that she had nymphomaniac tendencies and would not be averse to having a promiscuous affair while Garry was away.

Garry seemed to read my thoughts, and smiled, though the smile was grim. "Don't get the idea that I don't trust her," he said. "Oh, I know she's slept around, but she's a reformed character. Now I'm all she needs, and God help the bastard who tries to take her away from me."

They had said he was crazy about her, and now I believed it. I asked, "Why do you want me to keep an eye on her?"

He blew out a cloud of cigarette-smoke, looked behind him and said, "It's this other thing. You see, the S.S.D. are gunning for her. You knew that, didn't you?"

"No."

"Those K.G.B. lackeys on the other side of the Wall will earn quite a bonus if they can eliminate Elizabeth," he said. "I have nightmares in which I see her body floating on the Spree." He

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looked up. "She was on the other side of the Wall, one of Gehlen's Girls. She shot an S.S.D. man. Big Wheel. The guy died."

"You were bloody lucky to get her out," I said.

"Too true. We had to shoot another guy to do it. So we've had to keep Elizabeth under wraps. Lately, though, she's been getting the jitters. She thinks she's been followed." He shut his eyes, pinched the bridge of his nose. "You can understand how I feel about leaving her."

"Yes."

"If you'd keep an eye on things... "

"Well, of course," I promised. I suppose it was the least I could do for a close friend. Not that I felt happy about it. I was not at all sure that Elizabeth would want a watchdog around.

And now she had been helped ...or pushed...into this shiny black saloon. For a brief period I lost track of the car in one of those chequerboard layouts of streets the Teutons love to construct, but I caught sight of it again in a street the other side of the castle, quite close to the river. It parked outside a small house. I drove past and pulled up.

It was only a few yards to walk back to the house. The front door opened straight on to the pavement, and there was a bay window to the right of it. I rang the doorbell.

A curtain was pulled aside and quickly replaced. I had caught a glimpse behind the glass of the elderly man with the tufts of grey-white hair. A short time passed, and I was on the point of ringing again when the elderly man opened the door. His face was very lined, with sagging folds of flesh under his eyes, like a bloodhound's. There was no expression of any kind, but he made his voice sound reasonably pleasant.

"What is it you wish, please?"

I plunged. "May I have a word with Mrs. Charlton?"

"Mrs. Charlton?"

"Yes, I know she is here."

There was a short silence, then he said, "You are a friend of hers?"

"Of her husband's," I answered.

"Ah," he said, and stood blinking at me.

The younger man I had seen earlier now suddenly appeared in the background. His eyes figuratively ran a slide-rule over me. Then he appeared to lose interest. He said to the older man, "Father, Elizabeth wants a cigarette. Do you have any?"

The elderly man took a packet from his pocket. "Here you are." He added, "Kurt, this is a friend of Elizabeth's husband."

"Oh, really?" The younger man's face showed a faint glimmer of irritation. "Well, you under-

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stand that Elizabeth and I want to be left alone." He turned away abruptly and left us.

The older man looked embarrassed. "I am sorry about that," he said. "But you might as well know the truth."

"The truth?"

"My son, Kurt, and Elizabeth have been lovers for years. Your American friend is really no more than a silly amorous adventure for her. She has come back to Kurt to take up where she left off. They are going away together. There is nothing that you or I can do about it."

"I'm not sure about that," I said.

"I am."

"May I see her?"

He hesitated, then shrugged. "Perhaps you will take a little drink with me first."

"Thank you."

He led me into a room off the hall. At one end there was a glass door. I paused by the door and glanced into the room beyond.

"A happy picture, don't you think?" the old man said. "It would be a pity to disturb them."

I had only a rear view of Kurt and Elizabeth. They were sharing one armchair. The back of the armchair hid most of them from view, but I could see Elizabeth's wrist and slender white forearm, with its gold bangle, resting on the arm of the chair, and a cigarette between her fingers.

The old man said, "Please sit down."

"Thank you, no. I don't propose to stay more than a few minutes. I think I've seen enough to make it clear what the situation is."

My host poured a drink from a bottle of cognac.

"Elizabeth left a note for her husband," he went on, apologetically. "I have no doubt he will find it when he gets back."

"It will be a great shock."

"You think they were happy?"

"I thought so," I answered. "I didn't know about Kurt."

"It is all for the best," the old man said. "She will go away with him and find true happiness. Her husband must learn to get over it."

"Yes," I said.

He sounded relieved as he handed me the cognac. The faintest hint of a smile played about the wrinkled mouth.

He turned away to pour himself one, but before he could turn to face me again I curled an arm round his face, smothering that wrinkled mouth. I snatched the gun that made a bulge in the region of his armpit, and stuck my own gun in his kidneys.

"Make a sound and I shoot," I told him. "Now walk into the next room and act normal."

Kurt's face appeared above the armchair-back as we went in. Perhaps he read the anguish in the old man's face, for he leapt from

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the chair, hurling Elizabeth to the floor.

I fired as his hand went to his pocket. He screamed with pain and lay across the chair sobbing and staring at his shattered fingers...

My telephone call brought two men from Abteilung Eins (Department One) over; Bonn's tough discreet political police.

"Callous little sod, this young Kurt," said one of the Department One men. "I mean...necking with a girl he had just killed. What made you realize she was dead?"

I said, "He stuck a smoking cigarette between her fingers. That was part of his show. But it was odd. Elizabeth was a heavy smoker and I didn't see her take even one drag. Alerted, I watched the cigarette burn right down to the flesh...and I could see that she never felt a thing...not a bloody thing... "

Garry Charlton put down his beer. "It's all right," he said, "light up if you want to... "

"I just thought... "

"It's all right now. Here, have one of mine." †

Did you know...

For some years, American intelligence agents ran a smooth operation in Moscow called GAMMA GUPPY. While Soviet leaders made frequent use of the radio telephones in their limousines — assuming normal security procedures to be in effect, they discussed state secrets as well as timely gossip, such as Brezhnev's drinking problems, Kosygin's declining health — they were unaware that United States' eavesdroppers were recording every word.

Then came the security debacle of the '70s, the "Pentagon Papers." Soviet intelligence may have deduced from them the existence of GAMMA GUPPY, as the United States intelligence community feared, and so they tightened security, neatly eliminating GAMMA GUPPY as one result.

For confirmation, Soviet intelligence need only have researched Jack Anderson's syndicated newspaper column of September 16, 1971, in which he reported on the United States' ability to eavesdrop on the Soviet leadership as it roamed the streets of Moscow.

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ABOUT BOOKS

by Brian L. Burley*

"The Big Byte", by Peter J. Ognibene, published by Ballantine Books, New York, NY, July 1984, PB, 311 pp.

Willard Zack, alias the Wiz, is a computer hacker; a man whose whole adult life has been devoted to understanding computers and using them in unorthodox and often unauthorized ways. Although highly intelligent, Zack has dropped out of more colleges than he can keep track of, usually from boredom or because the school wanted him to study something not relevant to computers. The Wiz is one of the world's innocents, and none of his computerized meddling is motivated by political ideology or a desire for personal gain. Rather, it is his form of relaxation, his play. So when smooth-talking George Andrews offers him unlimited access to hardware and the challenge of cracking some of the most sophisticated data systems in the United States, Zack, seeing no ulterior motive in the offer, happily accepts. Before long, he is easily manipulating the Chicago Switch — the nerve center that controls the Federal Reserve System, and handles transactions between banks to the tune of $250 billion a day.

Andrews and the shadowy group behind him do have an ulterior motive, though, which is nothing less than economic blackmail of the United States government. The feds are not without resources to fight back, and soon recruit Professor Paul Sager, one of the top computer theoreticians in the country. Sager's reluctance is heightened when a counter-attack by Andrews' group forces him to allow his wife to believe him dead.

This is a prime mystery and adventure story, complete with bizarre sex, kidnapping, and a strange mysterious cult. And it repeats,

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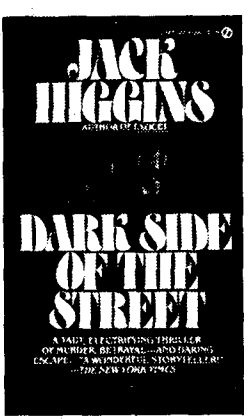
once again, the warning that the computer systems which have so much control and influence over our lives are not secure from this kind of technological tampering, showing the ease with which naive people can be persuaded to use their technical skills in the service of causes not their own.

I was, until recently, a high level computer analyst for a company which deals with exactly the kind of computerized financial processing described here, and while the specific techniques described by Mr. Ognibene are not usable, the general procedures are. Mr. Ognibene is obviously familiar with computer literature, or has assistants who are, since the data processing theory he describes is correct and represents the theoretical and practical state of the art.

For all of the author's knowledge, this is not a technical book, but rather one that is accessible to the general reader. The character of The Wiz is well-drawn, and represents a distinct type often found around computers. The other criminals are competently portrayed. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the professor and some of the others working to stop the cult.

I recommend this book. Read it for the mystery and its solution. But find a place in the back of your mind for the warning. The threat is all too real.



"Dark Side of the Street", by Jack Higgins, published by Signet, New American Library, New York, NY, May 1984. PB (reprint), 207 pp.

"I'd like you to meet Detective Chief Superintendent Black of the Special Branch of New Scotland Yard. He'd like you to go to prison for a few months."

With these words from his superior, agent Paul Chavasse's life takes an irrevocable turn. For several months, someone known only as The Baron has been masterminding the spectacular jail breaks of convicted spies and some of Britian's most hardened criminals. Now, Harry Youngblood, participant in a million pound air craft hijacking, was thought to be next. Only a man like Paul Chavasse, whose service in the field has equipped him with the cold heart of a killer and a mind of criminal

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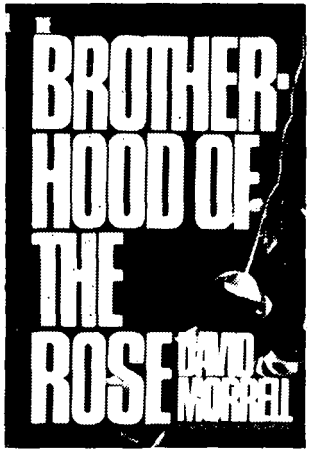
cunning, could win Youngblood's confidence, and escape with him to find The Baron.

As the book progresses, we follow Chavasse through a daring robbery which he actually commits, his not totally feigned friendship with Youngblood; and the complex twists of the Baron's escape route. The final resolution of the situation is explosive.

For all that it has a simple storyline, this is not a simple book. The character of Chavasse is complex, and not entirely sympathetic. Likewise Youngblood. A totally evil man, who was not the Robin Hood the media made of him at the time of his crime, seems to have redeeming qualities. The interaction between these two characters provides the major strength of the book.

The other characters are also well drawn, though of necessity they are more sketchy. Minor technical errors (for example, the time and amount of heat needed to cremate a human body), are not overly intrusive.

This is a quick read, and it grabs and holds the reader's attention. Several weeks after I completed it, I found its scenes still drifting through my mind. I recommend this one.



"The Brotherhood of the Rose", by David Morrell, published by St. Martin's/Marec, New York, NY 1984, 353 pp.

In the middle ages, a rose hung from the ceiling of the chamber used for a secret meeting symbolized that secrecy; hence we derive the term "sub-rosa" (under the rose). The rose symbol is entwined throughout Morrell's latest novel and figures prominently in its conclusion.

Saul Grisman and Chris Kilmoonie were close: closer than most brothers. Orphaned young, they had been reared in a harsh institutional/military environment relieved only by occasional visits of their gift-bearing foster father, Eliot. Guiding them gently through a study of oriental fighting arts, and later a tour in the Special Forces, Eliot shaped them into his fanatically loyal, special-agent team supreme: Romulus and Remus.

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The book opens as Saul successfully completes a special mission for his beloved mentor/father. All has gone well, arrangements for escape and concealment are in-hand. Mysteriously they fail! Someone, or something, has interferred with Eliot's plans. Increasingly, the evidence indicates that it was Eliot himself.

On the run, Saul contacts Chris, and together they try to re-establish the stability of their lives. They soon encounter mounting interference from the "brotherhood of the rose," the upper echelon of the entire international intelligence community. Chris has violated the sacrosanct Abelard Sanction, and, due to Eliot's double dealings, they are both marked for death. With only the aid of the beautiful and talented Israeli agent, Erika, they battle increasing odds in their quest for Eliot. And one mystery soon dominates all others: What was Eliot really up to, and who were his mysterious agents, Castor and Pollux?

This is an exciting, international adventure and mystery story. Of course, as with many novels in this genre, a certain science-fictional "suspension of disbelief" may be required in places, particularly in the extent to which the author carries the "honor among thieves" concept, suggesting that the camaraderie of the community of professional spys can supersede the national interests of the governments that employ them. Also interesting, although not completely new, is the concept of multi-national "safe-houses," known to all intelligence agencies, and safe from all of them. This is a fast-moving and enthralling novel, and the unreality of the premises are not a real problem. Although the book lacks the complexity and depth of character of the classics in the field, it's basically a good read, and I had difficulty putting it down. Were I a teacher grading this as a class submission, I would give it a "B". I recommend it.

*with an assist by Edie Kantrowitz

Brian Burley reviews books for "The Light Show", WBAI-FM, NY, NY.

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Stanislav Levchenko was the first KGB defector to escape from the very core of that vile organization. Pure gold to the FBI and CIA. But after they debriefed him in November 1979, he sought out John Barron for some *real* talking. Levchenko felt that he *had* to unburden himself . . . disgorge all he had thought and done, all that happened to turn his stomach and change his heart.

But why John Barron? Because Barron, years back, had written an expose of the KGB. It was so accurate that the KGB had it translated into Russian, and *used it as a training manual for the top brass.* Levchenko knew Barron was one man who would *understand.*

So well does he understand that Barron now gives us not only the fascinating odyssey of a major defector, but what amounts to a brand new manual. The contents more than justify the title. Here indeed is the *KGB Today.*

It's a firm rule in the USSR to ignore exposes like Barron's. So you can imagine the author's delight when *Pravda* and Radio Moscow denounced him. He's hitting them where it hurts most, because he's exposing the arch-thugs who hold it all together. For as Barron points out, "It is impossible to understand the Soviet Union without understanding the KGB and its transcendent role in Soviet policy and society." Now we understand better than ever.

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cliques of today's culture are dissolved, books like Barron's will tell the truth of our time." — *National Review*

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"Meticulously documented ... Levchenko has spilled the KGB's beans all over the floor." — *Human Events*

"As exciting as a dozen thrillers." — Robert Conquest

"In terms of hard, geopolitical importance, this book outranks and helps illuminate Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago.*" — *Newsweek*

John Barron provides an early glimpse of Andropov

On November 5, 1956, as Soviet tanks prowled the city, Kopacsi and his wife were captured while fleeing toward refuge in the Yugoslav embassy. The captors took them to the Soviet embassy and Andropov. "He met us, and was rather cordial and friendly," Kopacsi recalled long afterward. One might have thought all was well, but suddenly the KGB dragged the couple away to prison. Kopacsi can still vividly recall looking back and seeing Andropov standing at the embassy gate, waving to him and smiling.

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The Only Good Red

by Michael Bracken

Dmitri Sakharov, a low-level member of the KGB, sat on the upper deck of the McDonald's paddle steamboat and stared out at the swollen Mississippi River. On the table before him was a

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half-eaten Quarterpounder and an untouched bag of fries. A small Coke was securely captured in one slender fist.

He turned his head, glanced up the hill toward the Gateway Arch, then scanned the faces of the people boarding the boat, saw nothing to catch his eye, and returned his attention to the river.

Before long the Coke was gone, ice rattling in the bottom of the cup as Dmitri shook it, but the Quarterpounder and the fries remained. On another day Dmitri would have finished his lunch — he'd come to like American fast food in the six years he'd been in St. Louis — but today he had a queasy feeling in the pit of his stomach. He was afraid it was the flu.

Fifteen minutes later, Dmitri glanced at his watch. His contact was late. Dmitri sucked down the melted ice, then began gathering the remains of his lunch onto the brown plastic tray he'd been given.

"I'm sorry I'm late." His contact, out of breath, dropped into the seat opposite Dmitri. "I've been . . . busy."

Dmitri nodded, his brown eyes carefully guarding his irritation.

"It wasn't as easy as I thought."

Dmitri nodded again. Then they began talking quietly.

"It's all here," Dmitri's contact said. He opened his jacket to display the thick envelope stuck in the inside pocket.

Dmitri opened his own jacket, withdrew a white #10 envelope, and placed it on the table between them. It was snatched up before it could blow away.

"And now mine," Dmitri said.

The other envelope was placed between them, too heavy to be moved by the breeze. Dmitri reached for it. As he wrapped his hand around the envelope, the other man grabbed his wrist.

Dmitri felt a sharp pin-prick in the underside of his arm. He sucked in a deep breath of air, looked questioningly at his contact, and died. The contact left with both envelopes.

Twenty minutes later, Dmitri's body fell face-forward into his half-eaten Quarterpounder, alarming the elderly woman sitting to his left.

Christian Gunn had never been to the Midwest; he was usually given assignments in Europe and the Middle East. He sat in a bar in St. Louis' Central West End, watching all the fashionable people crowd around him.

He was sipping his second

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drink when a young man approached him.

"My brother collects falcons," the young man said.

Christian eyed the other agent carefully before answering. "I hear the Maltese are very expensive."

"Only in San Francisco." The younger man smiled and extended his hand. "I'm Ed Clark."

Christian finished the last of his drink and stood to follow his contact outside. Once on the sidewalk, they headed slowly toward Kingshighway. To others on the street, they looked like businessmen heading home after a drink and a long day at the office. While walking, the two men discussed the state of the economy and its effect on world trade.

Once inside Christian's hotel room, the topic quickly changed.

"The KGB thinks we killed Dmitri Sakharov," Ed said. "Officially, we didn't even know he was here."

"Unofficially?"

"We've had a man on him for the past year. Carlyle Smith."

Christian removed his jacket, revealing the .9mm Luger in the holster under his arm.

"We can't locate him," Ed Clark said. "We've tried."

"Has Smith ever disappeared before?" Christian splashed water on his face, then quickly wiped his hands dry with the tiny hotel hand towel. He'd flown in from London, stopping in New York for only a few hours.

Ed shook his head. "Never. He's been reliable — due for a promotion, actually. Until this."

"What about Sakharov? What was he doing here?"

"McDonnell Douglas. Monsanto Chemical Corp. Both big employers in this area," Ed Clark said. He settled his slim body in one of the hotel room chairs. "He could have been trying to pick up loose gossip."

"What do the reports from Smith say?" Christian kicked off his shoes and lay back against the bed, his hands folded under his head.

"Nothing. Nothing at all. According to the reports Smith submitted, Sakharov was clean as a whistle. Didn't even jaywalk."

Christian yawned despite his best efforts not to. "I'm sorry," he said. "It's been a long day."

The younger agent took the hint. "I'll be back in the morning with the files for you to look over." Ed stood. "At nine sharp."

Christian pushed himself off the bed and saw his contact to the door, watching the younger man's back recede down the hallway toward the elevator.

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Then Christian closed the door and prepared himself for bed. Before long, he was asleep.

It didn't last long. A few minutes past midnight, he was awakened by the sound of someone tapping lightly on his door.

Christian glanced quickly at his digital watch. It was too late for maids and he hadn't ordered room service. Christian pulled his Luger from the holster hanging on the chair next to his bed and carefully made his way to the door.

The tapping resumed, light and tentative. Christian carefully examined the closed door and the short hallway leading to it. Dim light filtering through the curtains from the street lights outside showed him the hall was too narrow to open the door from anywhere except directly behind it.

The tapping halted for a moment. Christian heard steps in the hall as someone heavy passed by outside, then the tapping resumed. Christian held the .9mm Luger at the ready, quietly reached for the door handle, and quickly jerked the door open.

A buxom brunette standing in the hallway gasped as she looked up the barrel of the Luger at Christian's naked body. He grabbed her wrist, jerked her off-balance into his room, and quickly closed the door.

She collapsed into one of the chairs, stared momentarily at Christian then turned her head slightly so that she was staring at the curtains, her cheeks stained with the red of embarrassment.

Christian didn't flinch, even though all he wore was his digital watch on his left wrist.

"I'm Andrea Smith," she said. "Carlyle Smith's sister. I . . . " She glanced at Christian again, the red stain on her cheeks slowly disappearing.

Christian slid back away from her, relaxing his grip on the pistol. He bent to retrieve his slacks from the seat of the other chair in the room. He slid one leg into them.

"Don't," Andrea protested.

Christian stopped, one muscular leg already inside the dark brown slacks.

"I mean, I'm a grown woman," Andrea continued. She licked her lips nervously.

Christian stuffed his other leg into the pants, pulled them up to his waist, and quickly buttoned them closed.

"How did you know I was here?" he asked, as he sat in the chair recently vacated by his empty pants.

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"My brother sent me," Andrea explained. The buttons on her beige blouse strained as she took a deep breath. She touched nervously at her soft brown curls. "He said to find you. He knew what flight you were coming in on. I had to talk to you."

"Where is he now? Why hasn't he reported in?"

Andrea shook her head. The curls floated gently around her face, then fell slowly back into place around her shoulders. "I don't know. He didn't tell me."

"How did he know I was coming?"

Andrea shook her head again. "He just told me to find you. You're the only one who can help him."

Christian returned his Luger to the holster slung over the back of the chair. Andrea Smith was easy to believe: she was too nervous to be lying.

"Carlyle hasn't reported into the agency since Sahka . . . Saka . . ."

"Sakharov," Christian pronounced carefully.

"Since he was killed. My brother thinks he's being set up to take the fall."

KGB officials had been screaming for blood ever since the news of Dmitri Sakharov's death had reached Moscow. If the CIA didn't hand over Sakharov's killer within the month, the KGB would retaliate. A minor agent working in Ecuador had already been named as their target of choice.

Christian reached for his shirt. "Will you take me to him?"

"I can't. He won't tell me where he is," Andrea said. "He called last night, told me what flight you'd be coming in on, and said to tell you the things I've already told you."

"What will you do now?" Christian asked.

"Go home, I guess. That's all I can do, isn't it?"

Outside the room, someone heavy strode down the hall. The rhythm of the steps caught Christian's attention. "When you were standing in the hall," he asked, "who passed by?"

Andrea described a large man, barrel-chested with a thick torso and thick arms. "He looked like he'd been drinking, but he carried himself well, as if he was more muscle than fat."

They listened as the footsteps disappeared.

"You won't be leaving tonight," Christian said. "My room's being watched by somebody. They saw you come in here. You can't leave alone and I can't leave with you."

"So what do we do?" she asked.

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"Get some rest," Christian responded: "I think we're going to need it."

Andrea slipped off her low-heeled shoes and began unbuttoning her blouse. Christian watched with interest.

"There's no use being uncomfortable if I'm going to be here all night," she said.

Andrea was breathing lightly when Christian slipped out of bed the next morning to take his shower. He pulled the covers back over her, trying not to disturb the sleeping beauty.

When he returned from the shower, toweling himself dry and smelling of soap, Christian found Andrea sitting up in bed.

"I heard the shower," she said.

Before Christian could respond, they were interrupted by a knock on the door. Christian glanced at his watch, then pulled on his clothes.

Andrea gathered her clothes and stepped into the bathroom.

When Christian pulled open the door to his hotel room, Ed Clark stepped inside. In one hand was a black leather briefcase. Ed quickly crossed the room, laid the briefcase on the small table, and popped it open. Inside were a bulging pair of file folders. Ed pulled them out and opened the first.

"Here're the reports Carlyle turned in," Ed said. "The other folder contains background on Sakharov. He was a nobody. Bottom-line agent. Barely more than a pencil-pusher." Ed rubbed at his eyes; they were bloodshot. He explained: "I've been up all night reading."

The bathroom door opened then, and Ed Clark spun around to stare at Andrea Smith. "Who's she?" he asked suspiciously. Then a sly smile slowly crossed his face. He said, "Your reputation seems well-deserved, Christian."

"This is Andrea," Christian said. When Ed Clark still showed no signs of recognition, he said, "Andrea, this is Ed."

Ed Clark nodded at the attractive young woman, said, "Pleased to meet you," and half-turned away from her to close the file folder.

"Maybe we'd better talk later," the younger agent said.

"Why don't we all go to breakfast," Christian suggested. He slung his holster over his shoulder, fastened it into place, then pulled on his jacket.

Ed Clark laid the file folders back in the briefcase and snapped it shut. Andrea Smith stepped into her shoes.

The three of them headed out

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of the hotel room and down the hall to the elevator. In the lobby, a heavyset man looked over the top of that day's *Wall Street Journal,* and watched as the three of them crossed the lobby.

Out of the corner of his eye, Christian watched the large man fold up the newspaper, push himself to his feet, and fall into step quite a distance behind them. The big man followed the trio out of the hotel and around the corner.

Christian nudged Andrea lightly. She looked at Christian, followed his quick glance toward their heavyset shadow, and said, "That's him."

Ed looked over. "Excuse me?"

"Nothing," Christian said. "Just saying how nice it is outside."

Breakfast went slowly, the two CIA agents and the woman seated around a small table in the back of a fashionable Central West End restaurant, only a few doors away from the bar where Christian and Ed Clark had first met.

Throughout the meal, Ed nervously eyed Andrea and Christian warily watched the big man who had followed them into the restaurant. At the end of the meal, Christian excused himself, leaving Andrea and Ed Clark alone at the table.

When Christian stood at the men's room sink washing his hands, the heavyweight stepped into the men's room. Christian had expected to be followed. He swung around sharply, planting a heavy fist in his shadow's gut. As the big man doubled over, Christian grabbed his shirt collar and forced him back against the bathroom wall.

The big man gasped for air. "Look, buddy, if you want my wallet, it's in my pocket." He took another deep breath. "I'll get it for you."

He began to reach for his back pocket. Christian grabbed the big man's wrist, twisted him around, and shoved his face into the pink tiled wall. Then Christian carefully pulled the .38 from the big man's waistband at the small of his back.

Cocking the trigger, Christian held the snub nose of the .38 against the base of his shadow's skull. "No games," Christian ordered. "It's time to talk. You've been watching my room all night."

"Anderson. CIA," the big man said. "Identification's in my jacket pocket."

Christian reached into the big man's pocket with his free hand, pulled out a slim wallet, and examined the I.D. "What is this, a convention?"

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Anderson didn't laugh.

"Why were you following me?"

"Orders."

"Whose?"

"Home office," Anderson said. "I'm in from Chicago. I wasn't supposed to interfere, just observe. Cover your backside."

"Doesn't look like you can cover your own," Christian said. He uncocked the .38 and slowly lowered it. When he stepped back away from Anderson, the big man slowly turned around.

Christian unloaded the revolver and dropped it in the open toilet bowl. "Don't bother following me out. If I see you again, I'll break one of your kneecaps."

When Christian returned to the table, Ed Clark asked, "When will we be able to talk privately?"

Christian glanced at Andrea, then picked up the bill for breakfast. "You won't have any more trouble," he said, as he left a trio of crumpled fives on the table and motioned for the others to follow him out. "I've taken care of it."

Andrea murmured her thanks.

"I'll walk you to your car," he said, still ignoring Ed's question.

Andrea shook her head. "I'll be all right. Just remember what I told you last night." She stared into Christian's eyes for a moment, then turned and walked down the block toward the hotel's parking garage.

Christian watched her go. Then Ed Clark steered him into a small Ford parked at the curb up the block from the restaurant. "Read these," he said, as he handed the briefcase to Christian. "We're going to Carlyle's apartment."

While Ed Clark maneuvered the Ford through the crowded streets of the Central West End, then downtown toward Soulard, Christian scanned the paperwork. He found nothing he needed to know and lots of things he didn't care about. His job was only to answer two questions — who killed Dmitri Sakharov and why? He wasn't any closer to the answers than when he'd arrived on the plane.

Carlyle Smith's apartment was comfortable, but bland. There was a nice record collection, some paperback books and magazines, and a comfortable-looking assortment of Sears and JC Penney furniture. The bed had been made before Carlyle had disappeared, and the dishes had been washed. Only one thing struck Christian oddly;

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there were no photos in Carlyle Smith's apartment.

"What were we supposed to find?" Christian asked.

"You tell me," Ed Clark countered.

Christian shrugged, looked around the living room one last time, and preceded Ed Clark downstairs to the car. They returned to Christian's hotel in silence.

As Ed pulled the small Ford to a stop, he said, "It's a big city. Smith could still be here, or he could be out of the country by now."

"I have a feeling he's still around," Christian said. "Keep looking. Call me when you find him. I'm going to study these files a bit more."

Christian climbed out of the car, Ed Clark's briefcase in one hand. In his room, he spread Carlyle Smith's reports on Dmitri Sakharov across his table top. As he read them, Christian discovered they were as bland as they had seemed when he'd scanned them earlier. They told him nothing of interest about Sakharov, but he did notice that Carlyle had changed typewriters about mid-way through his year-long surveillance of the soviet spy, and the typing on the reports grew increasingly sloppy.

After two hours, Christian stood and stretched. Paperwork had never been his strong point. He walked over to the phone, intending to call room-service to order a sandwich. Instead, he found Andrea Smith's name and phone number penciled lightly on a pad of paper next to the phone.

He dialed her number and, when she answered after the third ring, he invited her to dinner, agreeing to meet in the hotel restaurant at six.

Then Christian pulled on his jacket and went for a walk, confirming that his former shadow had completely disappeared.

Christian spent the afternoon alone, walking the paths in Forest Park and thinking, then freshened up in his room. He met Andrea at the restaurant, exchanged pleasantries while they examined the menu, and sipped at the wine he had ordered.

Ed Clark interrupted them. "Where the hell have you been?" he asked Christian in a low, rigid voice. "I've been trying to reach you for the past hour."

Christian looked up at the younger agent. He didn't respond.

"I've pinned down Smith. He's holed up in an apartment about a mile from here."

Christian finished his drink,

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stood, and held out his hand to help Andrea to her feet. To Ed Clark, he said, "Let's go."

Ed glared at Andrea.

"She's with me," Christian said. "There's no time to discuss it."

Ed quickly drove them to a small apartment building on the city's near-north side. He pointed to a ground-floor apartment with a door opening onto the parking lot. "There's no back door," he said. "I checked."

Christian stepped away from the car, carefully surveyed the situation, then made his way across the parking lot toward the door.

"What do you think you're doing?" Ed asked, angrily.

Christian half-turned to face him. "Taking the direct approach."

The younger agent hurried after Christian. Andrea climbed out of the car to watch.

Christian rapped sharply on the apartment door.

"I ain't buyin' no Girl Scout cookies," said a gravelly voice from inside the apartment. "Go away."

Ed Clark nodded. Softly, he said, "That's him."

Christian stood with his back to the wall of the building. To his right was the door. To his left was a massive window. The curtains were drawn shut, but Christian could see the faint outline of a man inside the room.

"We're not selling cookies," Christian yelled back. He motioned to Ed Clark. They both drew their weapons.

Ed Clark stepped back and kicked the front door open. Christian dove through the window, shattering glass and landing on top of a sturdy coffee table. He was behind an unarmed young man who matched the photo of Carlyle Smith he'd seen in the files.

Ed rushed through the door, spotted Carlyle Smith, and opened fire with his revolver. Christian lashed out with his foot, catching Carlyle behind the knee and knocking him to the floor.

Christian fired once and Ed Clark sank back against the doorframe. Ed tried to raise his revolver to fire again, then fell out the open apartment door onto the concrete walkway.

Carlyle Smith lay on the floor breathing heavily. Christian bent over him.

"He ordered me to wait here," Carlyle said, between gasps of air.

Christian helped Carlyle to his feet. Then he said, "Your sister's outside. You want to talk to her?"

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Carlyle looked up into Christian's eyes. "I haven't got a sister."

Andrea Smith stepped over Ed Clark's body into the apartment, the automatic in her hands aimed at Carlyle.

"Nice work," she said to Christian. Then she squeezed the trigger of the automatic and drilled a hole through Carlyle Smith's chest.

Christian brought the barrel of his Luger upward in one swift movement, but before he could fire, a gun roared and Andrea Smith pitched forward onto the carpeting.

"She's KGB," Anderson said. He was standing outside the broken window. Police sirens cut sharply through the night air, their sounds growing increasingly closer. Anderson motioned to Christian. "It's time to leave."

The next afternoon, Anderson sat in one of the hotel room chairs and watched as Christian Gunn packed his suitcase.

"When I introduced Ed Clark to Andrea Smith, they obviously didn't know each other," Christian said. "That bothered me. Then I got a good look at Carlyle Smith's reports. The last half-year or so were forged — that's why we went to Ed Clark's house this morning, to find the matching typewriter. Clark told me he'd stayed up all night rereading the reports. Actually, he spent the night writing them."

"Why would he do that?" Anderson asked.

"Because Smith's reports revealed that Sakharov was getting close to somebody on our side; that he was buying information from somebody. Only Smith didn't realize it was his immediate supervisor, Ed Clark. Clark knew about the reports and knew he had to do something before he was caught. So he killed Sakharov and tried to pin the blame on Smith. It was a good enough set-up to fool Andrea."

The big man leaned back in his seat. "A lot of people died because of a bunch of paperwork," Anderson said.

Christian finished packing the suitcase and closed the top. "It happens that way sometimes."

The two agents headed downstairs. Christian hailed a taxi to take him to the airport. Anderson watched as Christian climbed into the back seat.

As the cab was about to pull away from the curb, Christian leaned out the open window and said, "Take good care of your knees." †

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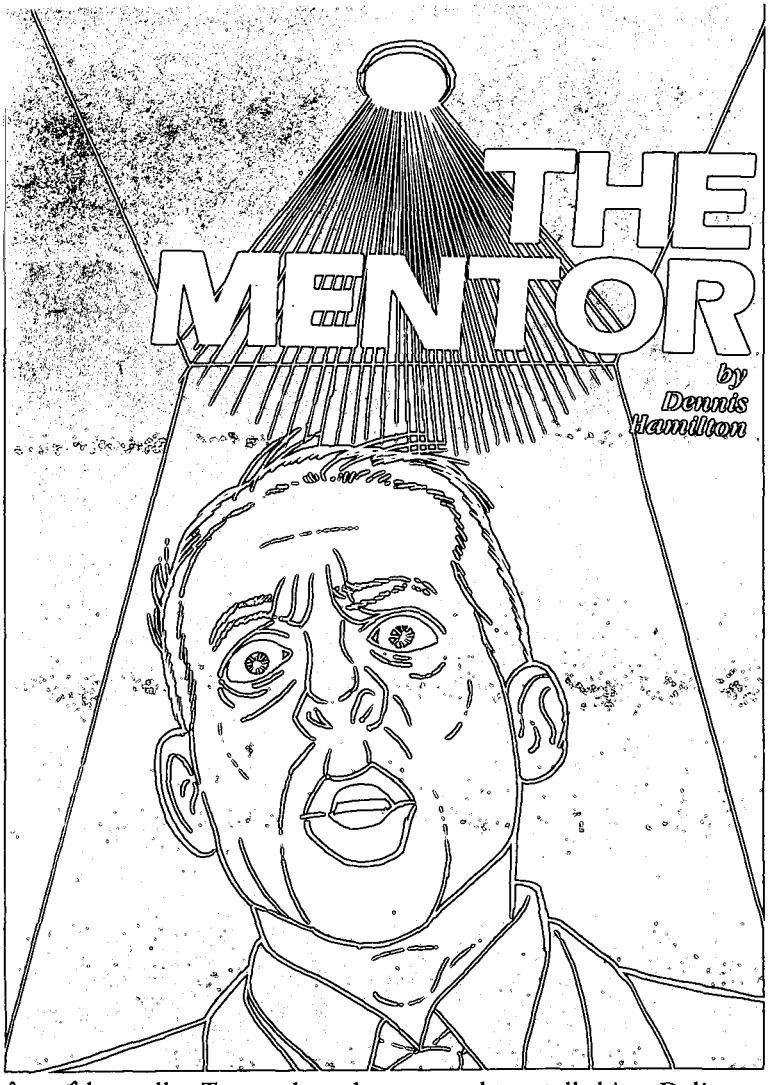

Illustration by Bruce Baker

The gulls, Trego thought, seemed to stalk him. Delicate, alabaster, breezeborne wolves. Just the sort of monitors Roman Essex would have out if he thought his assassin was coming. Essex, his old mentor in the Web, had always been the master of deception. Like a netherworld chemist, he concocted mixtures of prettiness and poison, death and decorum, civility and cyanide. Yes, the white, cawing gulls symbolized him perfectly. And for a fleeting moment, Trego envisioned them div-

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ing from their lazy drift, sharpened talons outthrust, and stealing his eyes.

Oliver Trego forced out the thought. But he accelerated his Porsche away from the knot of trailing gulls.

It was hot, the upper nineties, a typical Florida July. Trego followed the road into Porteus Bay, a magnificent crescent of white sand and green lawns and mansions rising above groves of palms. Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby could have lived here, thought Trego idly, and recalled the line about the rich not being like the rest of us. How true it seemed then.

Ahead he saw the entrance road. He had been to the estate before, at the housewarming, where he danced the schottishe and drank warm ale; and several times since for briefings and an occasional social call.

He stopped at the gates. Always before they had been locked — now they were open. True, locking them was merely protocol, a symbol. The walls were, after all, easily scaled, and the locked gates would keep out no one who really wanted in. Still, they'd always been a successful deterrent to straying passers-by. An oversight by Roman Essex? It was more like an invitation. There was a time, thought Trego with a transitory sadness, when it would never have happened.

He drove through the gates and wound his way along a cobblestone road. A quarter-mile inside, he pulled his Porsche beneath a massive portico eave behind the rear of Essex' three-story white stucco mansion. He left the keys in the ignition. This would, he calculated, be a brief goodby.

He followed a narrow bricked path around to the front of the mansion, the seaward side with its columns and balconies and marble walks. Imposing Royal Palms stood like sentries on an emerald-colored lawn, clipped to fairway length and perfected with meticulously sculpted shrubs. Beyond the lawn, extending to the seawall, was hot white beach-sand. And soaring above it all were the ubiquitous gulls.

A hundred yards out from the seawall, Trego saw white against blue: three overlapping triangles of a sloop's sails moving over a capping sea. Farther out, perhaps a mile, a yacht was anchored. Toys for the rich of Porteus Bay.

Moving up the walk, he glanced to the third-story balcony. Essex would be sitting near it now, gazing over the hypnotic sea,

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lost. Lost in memory. Reliving some adventure from a past teeming with them. Trego shrugged.

He climbed the steps and touched the chimes beside the door. He waited, but no one answered. Perhaps the servants were off. No, the monitors had told him Essex always had someone around. Trego pushed the intercom button. "Is anyone home?" he asked.

A couple of beats later: "Oliver?"

The voice was a frayed whisper. Trego was a little surprised Essex could so quickly identify him. "Yes, Roman. That you?"

"Yes. Wait a moment and I'll turn off the lock."

Trego waited, then slid open the large plate glass door and stepped from the heat into a cool vestibule. He walked across to the elevator, which Essex had had installed after his stroke. He pushed the button. Waited. The elevator, no doubt in deference to Essex' frailty, was slow. Idly, Trego counted: one ...two...three...four...five.

Inside, he pushed Three, counted down before the doors closed, then experienced only a whispered sensation of rising. Essex, he guessed, probably couldn't stomach any more speed after the stroke.

When the doors parted, Trego stepped into a cathedralic room. On the wall to his right, above the massive fireplace, hung the emblem of the Web: the world, its latitudinal and longitudinal lines distorted with rises and variations, giving it the appearance of being covered with a web. On a large teakwood desk were stacks of Web literature. The rich walnut walls could have been those from the Web's briefing room in Washington. Along the wall opposite the fireplace were rows of filing cabinets, perhaps ten. A fraction of what were in Web's paper shop, but enough to keep Essex attuned to current operations. Or to mentally replay old ones. Essex, Trego knew, could never let go.

And by the balcony door, his wheelchair to the sea, sat the legend — Roman Essex. Trego hadn't laid eyes on him in two years, yet that he had wasted was evident. The stroke a year ago had taken its toll.

"Roman?"

There was no response at first. Then, with obvious effort, Essex moved his right hand to the electronic control box on the arm of the wheelchair, then slowly wheeled around to face Trego. His face was waxen, emaciated. More so the left side, which had

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been paralyzed by the stroke. The left side of his mouth and the left eye sagged, unmoving, the flesh dead. His left hand was half the size it had once been. It curled pinkly into his lap.

But his right eye had retained everything. Bright blue, electric, intelligent. All that Essex had been and seen and done shone in that eye.

"Oliver," he said, from the side of his mouth that worked. "Oliver, how have you been? How long now? Two years? Is that any way to treat your mentor?" His voice, the whisper, was a shadow of what it had once been. His head listed toward a thin left shoulder, its muscles no longer supporting it. "You know," he said, "I was just sitting here looking out at the sea and thinking about you; about that mission you and I were on in Cairo. The good times we'd had. How we'd saved the world."

"My apologies, Roman," said Trego, walking over to him. "But I've been slaving away undercover in France. You know the old plot: dining in Luxembourg Gardens, courting those two-way whores to dredge up what they know."

"Double agents, eh? Females seem inherently good at that, don't you think?" His eye appeared thoughtful. "It's good duty, though I think Widow could have utilized you in better ways."

"Well, I've had a few off-the-beaten-path assignments, too," said Trego, in gentle self-defense. "Widow sent MacKinnon and me out to get ourselves conscripted as mercenaries for the Angola thing. We made the contact in Los Angeles and they smuggled us over just before it broke. It was tough, what with the malaria and heat and mosquitos big as ravens. But we found our man — an Angolan guerrilla named Willie Kibito. He was taking the arms the Soviets were supplying his men and selling them through a Swedish liaison. The arms were being filtered down to groups better off without them. Very rewarding, that mission, though we just slipped out with our skins. It was what the Web is all about in my eyes."

"You were always very loyal to it, weren't you, Oliver?"

"Yes. Yes, I suppose."

"I wonder," said Essex, "if perhaps blindly so."

"How do you mean?" asked Trego, sitting down in a soft leather chair that immediately sculpted itself to his back.

"Let's just say," he began slowly, "that of late I've begun to realize that the Web's indoctrination process tends to, shall we

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say, obviate one's discretionary powers. There is no longer, in the eyes of its staff and agents, the possibility it can do wrong. It actually has everyone believing its judgment is sanctioned by God. Or perhaps," he added gravely, "that it *is* God."

"In somewhat altered terms, Roman, that's what you used to teach us. Myself, MacKinnon, Penfold, Clark, Russell — after your lectures, we'd swear by your inspiration. If anyone convinced anyone that the Web's purpose was sanctioned by God, it was you."

Essex looked up and centered his large bright eye on Trego. "But surely, Oliver, you recognize limits. I taught you that the Web's philosophy was good, but philosophies can be perverted. Witness the communists. I never intended for you or anyone else to submit to mutations of it just because directives were issued over Widow's signature."

Trego suddenly became conscious of his own uneasiness. He hadn't been expecting a lecture, though he'd been told Essex had been harboring such sentiments for a year. He looked away, out the open glass doors to the balcony. Mounted on a tripod facing the sea was a telescope. Trego could envision Essex' reminiscing eye pressed to it for hours a day. Or was he doing something besides reminiscing? Could he, considered Trego, be watching for someone? If Essex was expecting company, it was company about which the monitors had failed to inform him. He looked back to Essex. "Roman, why are you asking me all this? I drop in for a visit with an old friend, my most admired colleague, and I find myself being grilled on this . . . this purely rhetorical issue."

Essex, with some pain, managed an ironical laugh. "It's no longer merely rhetorical, Oliver. Not at all. I'm afraid the evidence is in."

"You sound a little paranoid, Roman."

Half his face looked surprised. "Do I? Well, I should say it's justified." His whisper grew deeper. "Still, Oliver, I am interested in how you feel about the Web."

"Why me?"

"You were my best student. A prodigy. A prime example of intelligence, guile and reflexes, with the proper pinch of ruthlessness. You were the consummate operative. I'm simply curious if even you were so thoroughly indoctrinated that you can't tell right from wrong."

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"I've always considered myself able to do so." Trego's jaw jutted forward with some indignity. From the twinkle in Essex' right eye, he knew the old man must have perceived the movement.

"You ever change course mid-stream, Oliver? Ever dump a mission because you knew it was wrong? Ever fail to squeeze the trigger when you had the bad guy in your crosshairs? Did you ever do any of that, Oliver, even once?"

"No," said Trego. He stood and walked to the doors by the balcony. It was true: every mission had been stamped *Accomplished*.

With a switch on his wheelchair, Essex guided himself over to Trego. "And you've never had second thoughts about anything you've done? No three A.M. nightmares that the man and the cause you'd sabotaged the day before had been right and *you* had been wrong?"

"Your own courses taught us how to eliminate conscience, Roman." Trego wheeled to face him. "No, I've had no second thoughts. I've not been bothered by anything I've done. It was you who pounded into us the reality that the free world was shrinking all the time; that it would *require* an organization like the Web to keep it from dissolving altogether. Lord knows the CIA can't do it alone. Every move they make now is headlined the following day. They need an adjunct like the Web. Something underground, behind-the-scenes, a bit more adept in the shadows than they are. So we have to eliminate certain people; so what? It's a necessary part of the game. You know that better than anyone."

Essex sighed. "Eliminate. Harmless word, isn't it? A conscience-easer. You can sleep when you've eliminated someone. It would be a bit more difficult if you thought you'd murdered them."

Trego turned away from him. He looked out at the sea, watched a gull glide into and out of his view without even once flapping its wings. In the distance, he saw the yacht. To be on it, he thought, and done with this. "What has happened to you, Roman?" he asked, distantly. "You were so perfect for the life. Your skills, your attitude, your dedication — even your lofty position on the social ladder." Essex' family was enormously wealthy, corporate holdings scattered about the entire globe. It afforded

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him a perfectly unobtrusive cover for travel anywhere, anytime. "The Web has been good to you, Roman."

"And I to it," answered Essex, wistfully. "And now — now Widow wants me killed."

There was a numb pause before Trego turned to him. "What?"

"You *have* come to eliminate me, haven't you, Oliver?" Like a leech, his eyes locked on and wouldn't let go.

Trego was hesitant. He began to protest the notion as absurd, but he succumbed to his respect for Essex. He was too profound a man with whom to play games — especially games Essex himself had refined. Finally: "How did you know?"

Essex bowed his head slightly, as if descending into mild dejection. Perhaps, thought Trego, the old man had been hoping he was wrong.

"Because you were my finest pupil. You're the third to be sent, Oliver. Of course, you weren't aware of that. It's Web policy to keep in-house eliminations private. But Widow dispatched Penfold and Russell before you. They failed — failed Widow, at any rate. You see, I had the same discussion with them that I'm having with you. I convinced them, Oliver. I convinced them the Web — and Widow — are wrong about me."

"When were they here?"

"Penfold first, about six months ago. Then Russell about three."

Trego looked reflective, his gaze rising from Essex', then panning back over the balcony. "Did you know they were dead?"

Essex slowly looked down. "I suspected as much, but of course I'd had no confirmation. When they left, I told them to keep in touch. Also to keep an eye peeled for accident situations. I told them Widow would come after them if they didn't kill me. When I didn't hear from them, it was logical to assume Widow had had them eliminated." He sighed heavily. "How did they die?"

"Penfold was run down in East Berlin four months ago. Hit-and-run, the report said, but a coroner's note said the vehicle had backed over him after it had already hit him."

"Widow is nothing if not thorough."

Trego continued: "Russell was in Warsaw. He was having a very lucrative — in terms of information — affair with a Russian attache's wife. He was found dead one morning in his flat. His heart had burst. Someone had slipped in during the night and in-

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jected an air bubble into his bloodstream." He paused, blinked apocalyptically. "I'd just assumed it had been an angry Russian husband."

"Are you beginning to see the light, Oliver?"

"Perhaps," said Trego, noncommittally. "But of course you see my dilemma. If I don't eliminate you, then *I* will be eliminated."

Essex was cradling his small, pink, dead hand with his good one. "You're smarter than that, Oliver. You're smarter than the whole organization. And you're destined for Widow's chair. You know that."

"Only if I kill you."

"Or — if you kill Widow."

"*Kill Widow*?" said Trego, with genuine shock.

Essex smiled. "Do you see how you've been programmed? You question the act automatically, as if I'd asked you to put a dynamite charge under God's throne. Yet we are talking about someone who's murdered your colleagues without the slightest compunction."

"So you speculate."

"Do you doubt it?"

Trego paused. "I don't know. There's been nothing in the wind about it."

"Oliver, Widow is even older than I. And, although it's safely concealed, dangerously more senile. But Widow's senility is protected by unquestioned authority. And now the Web is manned with automatons who carry out their directives without any more rationale than that offered by Widow. It adds up to an organization that could eliminate the wrong man and start World War Three."

"And what about Penfold and Russell? Apparently you appealed to *their* humanitarian instincts."

"Only because they, like you, came to see me. I reasoned with them. But what if they hadn't? What if one had decided to use a rifle? Or burn the mansion? Or dose my medicine with something? If they'd not bothered to come and say their goodbys, I'd have been dead months ago." Now there seemed a faint plea in his voice. "And Oliver, I'm not yet ready to die."

Trego only looked at him.

"I've got eight months at the outside. Eight months and I'll be

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dead anyway. I want nothing more of the Web, only to be left alone with my memories of what it once was. That's all I have now. This house and thirty years of memories built into it. No, Oliver, I'm not ready to abandon these last months for the sake of Widow's misbegotten whim."

Trego was looking at him incredulously. "You really loved the organization more than any of us. Listen to yourself, Roman. Begging for a few more months to sit here by your balcony and look out at the sea and re-dream all those forgotten times."

"They're not forgotten by me; never by me. Not *my* part in keeping the world fit to live in." He paused to take a breath. "For you, among others."

"Oh, stop it, stop it! When did you start letting maudlin sentiment rule you? You've done your share of killing. More, I don't doubt."

"Always with discretion, Oliver. Never anyone who wasn't a threat to the free world — or to me. *That* was the Web's philosophy."

"There were others. Erich Zeller, that pitiful little German shoemaker whose eyes you shot out. No one mentioned it, Roman, but there were questions after that."

"He was hardcore Nazi, Oliver. The shoe shop was a front for East German agents. Our underground people had been tortured in its basement. Besides, Zeller was on to me. I had to eliminate him."

"Yes, you were always a survivor. Always, when the smoke cleared, there was Roman Essex standing victorious. Always one step ahead of your opponent. Like now, eh, Roman? You knew somehow that I was coming. You knew why. So you laid out this touching, eloquent, pathetic plea. Always you are one step ahead."

"It's necessary in order to survive, Oliver. I don't want to die. Not at your hands. Not at anyone's hands. I don't intend to. There is no justification."

"Is that how you plead? Innocent? The directive regarding your elimination was specific, Roman. You blew cover on MacKinnon in the operation at Londonderry. Purposefully? I don't know. Widow thinks maybe the stroke left you incapable of predictable rational behavior. That makes you a bad risk to other operations."

Essex just shook his head feebly. "I believe the word is that

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I was duped for the information while I was in the hospital. Just blurted it out, the story goes. Well, it's true in a sense — but I didn't do anything I hadn't carefully planned out, Oliver. It was a chess move. The physician who finagled my case was, in fact, a KGB boy. He knew me, but didn't know I knew him. In any event, he was on the verge of breaking open our cover in Stalingrad. I mean, he had every piece of the mosaic but one, Oliver, and I knew if he got it we'd have a massive purging up there. So I let him think the stroke had wasted my reasoning powers and I led him off on a tangent to Londonderry. Told him it was *the* vital cog in our network.

"In truth, it's not an important operation, and certainly was the least of those we had going at the time. Now he and his troops are there dodging flak from the Catholics and Protestants, trying to watch MacKinnon do something vital, which he isn't going to do. Like I said, Oliver, a chess move. I sacrificed a pawn to divert attention from our queen."

Trego was expressionless. "That's your version, Roman. Hero instead of goat. It could be pure fiction."

"It could be, but it isn't."

"Have you tried to tell your story to Widow?"

"Twice. Once after it happened; then, somewhat more indignantly, after the directive was issued to Penfold to eliminate me. But of course, Widow is beyond reasoning with now. People with God complexes tend to become that way."

Trego was silent. He felt an odd flush when he found himself thinking again that, no, he had never questioned a mission. It was Essex who ultimately spoke.

"The remaining issue, Oliver, is whether you are going to do it."

When Trego offered no reply, Essex guided his wheelchair over to the teakwood desk and pulled out a drawer. Late, Trego wheeled on him thinking: *gun*! But Essex had merely pulled out a control panel of switches.

"You needn't be startled, Oliver. Mobility is a problem for me now, so I control most of my life from these switches." He pressed one. "Food, if I want it. Assistance if I need it. Of course, as I knew you were coming, and why, I gave the servants the day off. What happens here today is between you and me." A trace of a half-smile. "I am only ill, Oliver. I am not a traitor."

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Essex backed up his wheelchair, then motored it over to a small paneled door, wheelchair height, built into the wall. He opened the door and removed two capsules and a glass half-filled with a wan-lemon liquid from a sterling silver tray. Essex placed the capsules in his mouth and washed them down with discernible effort. He replaced the glass, then rolled back to the desk and pressed the switch. The tray vanished down a small shaft.

Trego turned and walked out onto the balcony. He glanced down to the clipped and solemn lawn. So beautiful. He had always admired Essex' wealth, much the same as someone admires the mind of an intellectual friend. Wishing they possessed it, knowing they never would, but always enjoying its presence. He and Essex had been profound friends, their relationship more than once being likened to a father's and son's. Trego, years ago, had even heard unconfirmed whispers that the Essex estate had been willed to him in the event of Roman's death. But he hadn't given it much thought. He liked money, but he had never lusted for it. Nor, really, had Essex, although he had an enormous capacity for acquiring it in the moments between operations. For both, though, life had always been in accordance with the wishes of the Web. But now... .

"That view," said Essex, of the thing that had gripped Trego, "invariably captures my guests. Like you, now, Oliver. Captured."

Trego turned to look at him. He didn't speak, but he felt his abdomen tighten as he leaned against the iron balustrade.

Essex, behind the desk, had turned his head to center his good eye. "I'm hypnotized by it myself," he said.

"Why don't you join me out here?" asked Trego lightly, trying to camouflage the foreboding he sensed on the fringe of his professional awareness.

"Not just yet, I think, Oliver. First, there's something you must know. Then there's something I must know."

"I'm listening."

Essex wasn't smiling. "I've no doubt," he said. "This switch" — with a forefinger he indicated a switch on the panel — "I've only to touch it and that iron balcony on which you're standing will get a charge of about ten thousand volts. Enough to melt that telescope beside you. That's what I thought you should know."

Trego's breath caught on the thought. He wondered — bluff?

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He examined the distance across the balcony: about ten, twelve feet. He felt the sweat wash over his ribs. "What is it you want to know?" asked Trego.

"I believe the question," said Essex, with no kindness in that steady, staring eye, "was: Are you going to carry out your directive?" He let his finger rest ominously on the switch.

Neat, thought Trego. But he wasn't bitter at having swallowed Essex' lure. Oddly, he felt a familiar admiration for the old man. The thought tugged at his mind: Could Widow have been mistaken about him? Finally, Trego answered: "No."

For a long moment they watched one another, all the years of intimacy in their eyes, the years of working together until each had acquired an almost telepathic ability to know what the other was thinking. Then, after each had drawn and quartered and examined every movement, Essex removed his hand.

Trego's shoulders slumped. Every limb, every joint, felt drained. Only then did he realize that, subconsciously, he had known the truth: Essex had not been bluffing. The balcony was rigged. He bowed his head, in weakness, in deference to Essex for having beaten him, and walked back inside.

Essex sat by the desk, cradling his pink hand, looking not victorious but sad. Trego walked over to him and placed a hand on his shoulder. Beneath the robe it was skeletal.

"Where will I go, Roman? What will I do? The Web has been my life. When Widow finds I've backed out, there'll be a directive issued on me. Now you tell me — what do I do?"

"You're a resourceful man, Oliver. But you're right about Widow, and that is who you should eliminate. Hopefully, before it's too late. The Web will be yours; perhaps then we can all get back to the business of saving the free world. It does need saving, Oliver. It may just be closer to death than I." He sighed and touched one of the switches on the panel. "I've summoned the elevator for you." He turned his wheelchair to face him. "Please, don't let me see you again. Goodby, my friend."

"Goodby, Roman," Trego said, softly. He turned and walked to the elevator. He waited, thinking. Then he began counting seconds waiting for the doors to open. One...two...three ...four ...five.....He stepped in and didn't look back at Essex. The doors closed.

At One, he counted, though not aloud. The doors opened.

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Trego looked across the glass-enclosed foyer, out across the lawn, then deeply into the blue sea. He saw the gulls, the palms, and in the distance the white yacht. All out there, for the taking of a step. But he didn't move.

He reached up and touched the third floor button. Then, with the same hand, he reached inside his jacket and withdrew his 9mm Smith & Wesson Model 59. He popped out the 14-shot clip, then slapped it back in and cocked the shell into the chamber. Essex was right, thought Trego: He *had* been the best student. And he had taught him well; too well for his own good. The Web comes first, always first. Essex was a threat, knew too much, was too old, too infirm to be trusted with the knowledge. Once a great soldier, thought Trego, but, as Widow had reminded him, not one who could be allowed to fade away.

Trego closed his eyes, let the coldness come over him, the coldness he always felt when he had to kill. And, just as Essex had taught, Trego began to mentally slip outside himself, until he was a separate entity, a completely detached observer who could *watch* the killing machine of Oliver Trego.

Essex would be back in front of the balcony by now, facing the sea as always, facing away from the elevator. Trego envisioned the act: He would ride up, the door would open, and he would aim and fire at the back of Essex' head. Quick. Cold. No taut glances, no painful remembrances. Just the back of another target's head.

Then the doors closed. Trego counted — one...two...three ...four...five.... But something was wrong.

The elevator didn't move.

Trego, puzzled, pressed the button again. He waited. Nothing. He holstered his piece and tried to pry apart the doors, but they were sealed like a vault. In the next instant, all of Trego's emotions welled together — anger and shame and desperation. He didn't know how, but he knew he was dead.

"Oliver?" the whisper was soft, raspy with emotion. It came from a speaker behind the light at the top of the elevator.

Trego, drenched with his last sweat, looked up without speaking.

"I asked you not to return. You had only to walk away, to leave me, but you declined. In truth, Oliver, I had not expected it of you. But of course, I'd taken precautions. You understand the

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necessity of this. You're a professional." He paused, and Trego could hear him take a labored breath. "It's regrettable, though, that your most memorable lesson in staying one step ahead is also your last." There was a small final click as Essex switched off the speaker.

Trego wheeled furiously and smashed his hand into the door. He reeled back in agony, went to his knees holding his broken hand. Then he heard the hissing. His distended, maddened eyes went to the ceiling. He saw nothing, felt nothing, until the scent of almonds drifted down to snatch at his sanity. Immediately, he went to his feet, weeping, nostrils flaring hideously, and he began savagely beating on the door to his tomb, first with the good fist, then with the broken rag of the other. Then Trego felt an agonizing sting in his lungs and he filled the elevator with his death scream; held it for as long as he could force out air, knowing that the first breath he took in would be the last breath of his life. Cyanide, Trego knew from experience, worked very quickly.

On the balcony, Essex listened. He could hear the elevator shuddering in its dark shaft. Only Trego's final scream erected the hackles on his neck. In thirty seconds, it was over. Essex, in spite of what Trego had come for, felt a penetrating sadness that another time he might have allowed himself, out of friendship, to retain. But he couldn't do it now and, professionally, he brushed the emotion aside.

He guided his wheelchair over to the telescope. Widow will send MacKinnon next, he thought. It was *his* cover that was blown in Londonderry; he will want revenge the worst; he won't, Widow will surmise, be so susceptible to reason as were the others. But Essex knew that, like the others, even MacKinnon would come see his old mentor first. And then, one way or another, he would take him, too.

Essex pressed his large, bright, seablue eye to the telescope and focused in on the yacht. Widow was on it, he knew. Watching. The yacht had been there when Penfold came. And Russell. And it would be there when MacKinnon comes. And then who knows? thought Essex. Maybe even Widow might take him on. But Essex would worry about that later. For now, he began thinking back, back to an unforgettable mission with MacKinnon in Portugal, and the good times they'd had, and how they'd saved the world. †

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ON FILE.....

THE BLACK MADONNA

by Richard Walton

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It was a night so cold that birds froze to the trees, and the terrified woman floundering through the snow shuddered as the oncoming wolves howled ravenously behind her.

Could she reach the head of the Carpathian pass and ski down the far slope beyond their reach?

If not . . .

She glanced over her shoulder. They were near, their red eyes glowing like coals in the darkness; then she felt the snow levelling out beneath her.

She turned, backing against a giant boulder, snatching a pistol and dagger from her belt as the beasts leaped forward.

Four died, reddening the snow before her pistol was empty; but one was left: the cunning leader. Waiting until she was weak and helpless, it launched itself on her with a bestial snarl.

She dropped to one knee, flinging out her left hand with the knife gripped in it, feeling the jarring thud as it sank to the hilt in the wolf's breast.

The battle was over and she skiied wearily into the valley beyond the pass.

But enemies more dangerous than the wolves were down there, too, that night in 1940,

Christine relaxing between assignments. ▲

and, fighting them, the twenty-four-year-old girl became a living legend as one of the second World War's most glamorous spies.

Her name was Christine Skarbek — former convent novitiate and beauty queen, Polish countess — in those days one of Europe's top woman skiers and an international big-game huntress.

She was hunting rhino in Africa when war broke out and the Nazis razed her luxury estate in Poland to the ground. Leaving Africa immediately, she volunteered in England for the

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secret service. The men in Whitehall took one look at her . . .

A woman speaking ten European languages fluently, who could grace a cocktail party one moment and hunt dangerous big-game alone the next, was ideal spy material and a perfect social chameleon.

Later, she infiltrated German espionage networks in Warsaw, to steal blueprints of a new bomb the Allies wanted.

She also helped another espionage agent, Colonel Ludwig Popiel, smuggle a secret anti-tank gun out of Poland, under the German noses.

Count Ludwig Popiel shared danger and death with her. ▲

Back in Britain, Christine trained as a paratrooper. She was dropped behind enemy lines to organize Resistance groups in the Balkans, Italy and France (not in those early days dominated by Communists, as they would be later).

One night, in Northern Italy, where Partisans called her "The Black Madonna" because of her dark hair and fine features, Italian soldiers caught her. Christine raised her hands . . . then opened her palms to show a grenade in each. As she threw them the soldiers fled, screaming in terror.

Her greatest coup came after D-Day, when the Allies desperately wanted information on the retreating German escape routes, so they could be destroyed by aerial attack to save Allied lives.

Christine was determined to get this information, but she had another objective that day, too: an exploit that has gone down in espionage history as a unique example of bravery.

Held prisoner, awaiting execution in the local Army headquarters, were three other secret agents she knew: Max Sorenson, Jan Fielding and Francis Cammaerts.

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Smartly dressed in a military-style, two-piece costume, and carrying a rolled umbrella, Christine strode into the building, pushing aside a startled sentry, and rapped her umbrella on the Commandant's desk.

Startled by her appearance, mistaking her perhaps for a Nazi Party official, he leaped to his feet with a hasty salute. Arrogantly, she waved him back into his chair and told him in fluent German:

"The Allies are only a few hours from here, and you and your staff will be shot on sight as war criminals if you do not release the three spies to me immediately!"

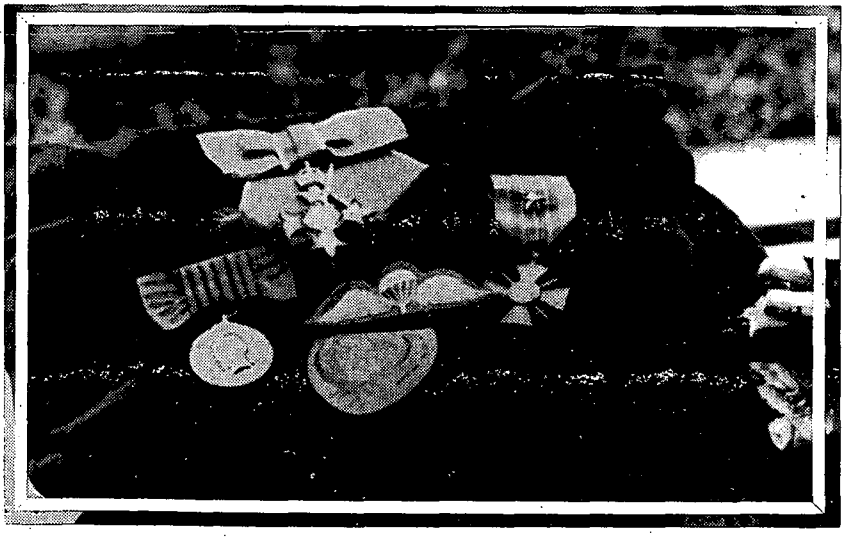
The Commandant blushed deep red, opening and closing his mouth like a stranded fish.

"Who are you?" he stammered. "Some kind of spy?"

"Precisely!" she snapped, haughtily. "And don't stare at me like the village idiot! I'm Field Marshall Montgomery's niece, and I mean every word I say. Touch those three men and you sign your own death-warrant! Bring them to me immediately."

She strode past him to a wall map and marked on it, with her umbrella, an imaginary pincer-movement encircling the town where the Allies were supposed

Among Christine's medals lie floral tributes, and her parachute wings. ▼



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to be.

At the same time, she was making careful mental note of where the German escape routes were; they were clearly marked in red on it.

The Commandant fell back into his chair. Communications had been bad. Perhaps she was not bluffing. How could she be so confident, otherwise?

So he released the prisoners; and five minutes later, Christine walked out with them . . . and the secret information, too.

Had the Commandant checked first with Berlin, he would have been instantly promoted and given a medal, because Christine was on both Martin Bormann's and Heinrich Himmler's death-lists.

She survived the war, to be given bravery medals by both the King of England and General de Gaulle; and for a time, she worked with the Free Poland movement, because there was no way she could return to her homeland, then under Communist domination.

But she made the mistake of befriending a lonely English sailor, called Dennis Muldowney, who thought she was in love with him. When she told him their affair was only platonic, he ambushed her one night in the foyer of her London hotel and stabbed her to death.

Muldowney, the jealous man who killed her. ▲

They hanged him for the crime, and Christine's sad funeral was attended by secret agents from all over Europe, many of them today, ironically, enemies in the Cold War climate.

But there was an even greater irony to her death . . .

She had given the knife that killed her to Muldowney, as a souvenir. It was identical to the one that had saved her life, when the wolves ran her down, all those dangerous years before.

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THE INTELLIGENCE PROCESS

Part II

by Ernest Volkman

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On the morning of February 3,1941, Hitler and the top officers of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW, the German high command) met to finalize planning on the military campaign for which, Hitler had promised, "the world will hold its breath" – the invasion of the Soviet Union. Code-named BARBAROSSA, the plan was audacious in scope and daring: nearly 3,000,000 men and thousands of tanks and planes to sweep into Russia in three giant pincer movements that would trap and annihilate the bulk of the Red Army, defeating the Soviet Union before the first winter snows.

Despite Hitler's confidence, the OKW generals had been growing increasingly nervous as the details of BARBAROSSA began to fall into place; was the vast scale of the operation beyond Germany's capabilities? Among the more skeptical was General Walther von Brauchtisch, commander in chief of the German Army, who began to tick off his objections that morning: vast distances to be covered, a distinct lack of good roads for armor, long supply lines back to Germany, and enormous numbers of trained Russian reservists that gave the Soviet Union a decided advantage in manpower.

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Hitler derided these objections, insisting that a two-month campaign would defeat Russia totally because the Soviet Communist Party was in such disfavor among the Russian people, the Red Army would melt away – provided the first German military successes were decisive. "The whole thing will collapse like a soap bubble," Hitler said, ending the discussion.

Since Hitler had never been to the Soviet Union, what intelligence had he received to convince him that a swift kick to the door of Russia, as he put it later, would cause "the whole rotten structure to come crashing down"? Virtually none; Hitler believed that the Soviet Union would collapse like a soap bubble because he wanted to believe it. At the moment he was overcoming the uneasiness of his generals, German intelligence had not produced a single analysis on how the Russian people might regard an invasion by Germany. Nor had there been any study on how many reserves the Soviets might be able to call up in the event of an invasion, nor, for that matter, was there an accurate overall study of Soviet military.

Indeed, at that point, German intelligence was almost totally blind, a circumstance that is clear only in retrospect. To the outside world in 1941, Nazi Germany's intelligence had a reputation for omniscience. The sweeping victories of 1939 and 1940 had created the illusion of vast, cunning espionage networks providing detailed intelligence to pave the way, including the popular World War II myth of "fifth columns" everywhere. But in fact, German intelligence was a joke; it was composed of a number of warring fiefdoms which spent more time fighting each other than collecting intelligence. As Hitler himself realized, German intelligence was notoriously unreliable: he had bitter memories of intelligence reports that had called the French Army "invincible," the Maginot Line "impregnable," and had predicted that the Czechoslovakians would resist the Munich Agreement with military force, and that the British and French would try to save Poland by mass assault.

With that sort of record, it is not surprising, given Hitler's personality, that he came to regard his own intuition – proven right time and again – as superior to any intelligence report. Against the unprepared and divided democracies of the West, such intuition had prevailed, but the invasion of a far more formidable Soviet opponent was a far different matter, a fact which Hitler did not recognize. Moreover, by 1941, there was no longer any hope that German intelligence, already discredited in his eyes, could serve any sort of counterweight to the Fuhrer's intuition. By then, the rot of Nazi orthodoxy had spread deep into the

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German intelligence hierarchy, as it had spread deeply into every other phase of the German war effort. The *Abwehr*, Germany's main foreign intelligence service, was in the process of being subsumed by the competing and much more rigidly Nazi organization run by Heinrich Himmler's SS, the *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service, known as SD). Worse, all intelligence had to pass through the hands of a number of Nazi toadies and sycophants around Hitler, who tended to tell him only what he wanted to hear.

Hitler wanted to hear that the Soviet Union would easily collapse, and that is exactly what the increasingly Nazified intelligence services of Germany proceeded to tell him. Not that they were confronted with a vast body of intelligence contradicting their glib assurances: *Fremde Heeres Ost* (FHO, the German military intelligence division responsible for the Soviet Union), did not have the vaguest idea of what was happening in that country. In preparation for BARBAROSSA, FHO -- along with the *Abwehr* -- ran extensive radio intercept, border-crossing and air reconnaissance operations against the Soviet Union, but these only covered a relatively narrow area just inside the Soviet borders. The rest of the country was one giant blank.*

FHO's incompetence stemmed mostly from its chief, Lieutenant Colonel Eberhard Kinzel, the very model of a Prussian staff officer, complete with monocle. But he was far from being a typical Prussian ascetic; a devotee of the good life, he was totally enamored of his gorgeous blonde mistress, who was apparently responsible for the fact that he showed up for work each morning looking dog-tired. Her charms, which were reputed to be considerable, also may have helped to divert Kinzel's attention from intelligence work, for which his staff in any event realized he had no aptitude. Kinzel, an infantry officer with little intelligence experience, was personally responsible for FHO's major work before BARBAROSSA: a detailed intelligence report on the Soviet Union, designed to be used as a handbook by German forces. As an intelligence report, it was not worth the paper it was printed on; eager to curry favor with Hitler, Kinzel painted a picture of a nation on the brink of collapse, incapable of resisting any German military attack. Among other things Kinzel's report claimed that the Soviet industrial capacity was insuf-

*The Germans had no high-level sources inside the Soviet Union, save two officers on the staff of Red Army General Konstantin K. Rokossovsky. However, these two men were actually double agents working for the MVD, the Soviet intelligence service, which used them to funnel a large amount of misleading information to the Germans on Soviet military strength.

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ficient for a long war, that the Red Army, decimated by purges, was inadequate; and that the quick capture by Germany of Russian territory west of the Urals would lead to a total defeat of the Soviet Union. By interesting coincidence, these were exactly the beliefs of Adolf Hitler.

The FHO represented Germany's main intelligence resource of the Soviet Union. Another was the German military attache's office at the embassy in Moscow, but here again, the rot of Nazi dogma had blinded the Germans. General Ernst Koestring, the German attache, was a 65-year-old cavalry general whose family had been merchants in Moscow. A Russophile with a good sense of the Soviet Union's military potential, Koestring tried to convey subtle warnings before the BARBAROSSA onslaught about Russia's military power. But Koestring fell ill in April, 1941, and was replaced by Colonel Hans Krebs, a young *Wehrmacht* officer on the make.

Krebs, like Kinzel eager to win the Fuhrer's favor and gain high command, was aware that some of Koestring's cautious reports had been dimissed by Hitler as "rubbish." So Krebs set about to make amends and ingratiate himself. In May, 1941, only one month before the German invasion, Krebs reported to Berlin that the Soviet Union was even worse off than previously believed. "Russia will need 20 years to retain the old level," he wrote in one report, adding that there were less than 200 Soviet divisions to stop the German onslaught, and most of those were incompetently led, anyway. Krebs' reports were heartily endorsed in Berlin, where a confident Hitler finalized the BARBAROSSA plan he was now convinced would defeat the Soviet Union in a campaign lasting only a few months.

It was not long before the Germans realized how badly their intelligence had let them down.* By August, less than two months after the invasion had begun, an anguished General Franz Halder, the German Army's chief of staff, noted that intelligence had reckoned on about 200 Russian divisions in the field, yet his troops had already identified at least 360, and new ones seemed to be springing up out of thin air. Field commanders cursed the wildly inaccurate maps intelligence had provided them, show-

*The failure did lead to a big shakeup in FHO: Kinzel was replaced by Colonel Reinhard Gehlen, who some years later became head of West Germany's intelligence services. Kinzel subsequently headed German forces in Northern Europe; he surrendered in 1945 to the British, then shot his blonde and himself. Krebs became a Hitler favorite and ultimately was named Nazi Germany's last army chief of staff in 1945. He shot himself in Hitler's bunker on the last day of the war. Koestring survived the war.

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ing roads and villages which did not exist. And *Luftwaffe* commanders, ordered not to bomb Soviet armaments plants because the high command wanted the factories kept intact for capture (intelligence had said the plants would be overrun), watched helplessly as Soviet industry – far from being weak – was already beginning to swamp the Germans in an ocean of weapons. (In four years, the Russians produced over 95,000 armored vehicles alone from their unbombed factories.)

"I hope you like a little Russian dressing in your salad . . ."

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The failure of BARBAROSSA stands as a monument to the stupidity of Hitler and his Nazified intelligence services. In retrospect, it is hard to believe that the failure could have been so colossal. It is especially unbelievable considering the fact that it took place just over two decades since World War I, one of whose central lessons was a collective conviction by the European powers that the intelligence failures of that war must never be repeated. Those failures concerned perceptions and judgments of potential or real enemies. The lesson was clear: before World War I, military machines all over the continent were so fine-tuned, merely a single spark was necessary to set off the conflagration. It was a time when Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany once perceived the presence of only a handful of Russian torpedo boats in the Baltic as sufficient justification for alerting the entire German High Seas Fleet. The problem was the military technology – and the speed of intricate mobilization plans – had outrun the capacity of intelligence agencies to give sufficient warning. Still operating at the pace of the 19th century, no intelligence service of any major European power had developed comprehensive intelligence reporting and analysis systems that could give sufficient warning to policymakers. And those policymakers, operating in the blind, mobilized at the slightest pretext, ultimately setting off the chain of events that led to war. As German Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke had prophesied some years before the Austrian crown prince was assassinated at Sarajevo, "War will begin over some *dummkopfzig* business in the Balkans."

Yet, World War II demonstrated that Europe, however well its nations seemed to draw that lesson of World War I, wound up repeating the same mistakes. Thus, much like the previous world conflagration, the nations of Europe again groped like blind men toward war. The major misperceptions, misjudgments and outright stupidities that led, inexorably, to World War II are generally well known. However, there are a number of much less well-known intelligence failures that were to have dramatic consequences. Among them we can include:

- British intelligence completely misread the German *Luftwaffe* before the war. Dominated by advocates of strategic bombing, the Royal Air Force, especially its intelligence service, *assumed* that Germany would also concentrate its efforts on a large strategic bombing arm. In 1937, the British concluded that the *Luftwaffe* would be able to drop 3,500 tons of bombs per day on Great Britain, a figure estimated to rise to nearly 5,000 tons a day by

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1940. In fact, the *Luftwaffe*, designed almost exclusively as a tactical air arm for support of German ground units in land battle, never developed a real strategic bomber force. German bombers were capable of dropping only a maximum of 150 tons a day in 1937, and the highest tonnage of bombs dropped per day during the Battle of Britain was 600 tons, a relatively puny amount, considering the large number of targets. The British estimate had a direct impact on the Munich crisis: one of the chief reasons for British eagerness to appease Hitler was a conviction that the Germans, in event of war, could immediately unleash a devastating bombing offensive against England.*

• Both British and French intelligence knew, in some detail, the disposition and strength of German forces facing them in France during 1940. But their intelligence was shallow: they had not bothered to analyze the dramatic shift in the German Army's tactical doctrine, which featured coordinated dive bomber and infantry assaults, spearheaded by masses of tanks. Known as *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war), the new German tactical doctrine easily punched through the thin British and French linear defenses, in large measure because both armies failed to deploy an adequate number of anti-tank guns against massed German armor. The Germans had unveiled *Blitzkrieg* successfully a year before in Poland, but the British and French – convinced that their own military forces were far superior to those of Poland – discounted the evidence that World War I-style defenses were no match against modern coordinated assaults under air cover.

• The Japanese, convinced that their top-level codes were unbreakable (and also convinced that Westerners could not master some of the more intricate subtleties of the Japanese language), devoted no effort toward finding out if in fact the codes were safe. Thus, they failed to notice clear evidence that the codes had been compromised. At one point, early in the war, the United

*British intelligence also became obsessed with the threat of mass German air attack that would drop poison gas bombs. The British, who suffered appalling casualties from the first German gas attacks in World War I, had ever since then been especially concerned about German gas weapons, a natural enough fear considering Germany's acknowledged worldwide lead in chemical research and development. But there was, another more prosaic, reason for the fear: a movie. In 1936, "The Shape of Things to Come," an Alexander Korda film based on the H.G. Wells novel, showed a future-world gas attack from the air that paralyzed the entire nation. The film had such a strong public impact that the British government was stampeded into a decision to equip the entire British population with gas masks – at the expense of air defense measures.

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States unwittingly gave away the secret of its code-breaking success: a front-page story in the *Chicago Tribune* revealed that the American victory in the battle of Midway was won in large part because of American ability to read Japanese codes. This colossal security lapse went unnoticed by the Japanese, whose intelligence service wasn't looking for it.

• German intelligence before the war began to suspect that the British might be developing a new electronic device to detect enemy warplanes at great distance. Construction of several tall radio-type masts on the English coast heightened that suspicion. By 1939, shortly before the outbreak of the war, the Germans had devised a system to verify their suspicions — the world's first signals intelligence aircraft. Actually, it was not a plane, but the zeppelin *Graf Zeppelin*, up to that point used mostly on "goodwill" cruises all over the world. Sister craft to the ill-fated *Hindenburg*, the *Graf Zeppelin* was a perfect spy ship, since it could hover for long periods of time and had a very long range.

There was one problem: the airship's steel girders disrupted radio signals, so an ingenious solution was devised. Somebody remembered that the old World War I zeppelins had little gondolas that could be lowered far beneath the ship; why not put detection gear into the gondola and lower it away from the interference of the girders? A search all over Germany finally produced a surviving gondola in a zeppelin museum, whose puzzled staff was enjoined to silence as German intelligence fit the device aboard the *Graf Zeppelin*.

With the interference problem out of the way, the airship then sailed all over Europe, packed with detection gear and 30 trained operators. In August, 1939, the airship floated over the English coast, trying to find out about those mysterious radio masts. The gondola, containing a radio direction-finder and a terrified operator, was winched down 3,000 feet under the airship. Hanging by only a wire, the operator turned on his equipment — and immediately picked up experimental beams being broadcast by German direction-finding stations. By an incredible coincidence, the German beams went on the air just as the British were testing their radar beams. The stronger German signals caused the *Graf Zeppelin* to miss the first experimental beams broadcast by those British masts — which were being used to test a new device called radar. (The very first assignment of the new British radar was to track the *Graf Zeppelin*; the British carefully did not warn their air fighter squadrons about the airship so that the Germans would not be tipped off about radar.) As a result, German intelligence wound up concluding that the British did not have

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a new air-detection device operation. A year later, German bomber squadrons were cut to pieces by British fighter planes vectored onto the bombers by radar.

• British Navy intelligence before the war badly underestimated the German U-boat threat. The British believed that the World War I development of sonar detection gear checkmated any potential German submarine threat, which was narrowly defined as U-boat operations against fast-moving ships in daylight. In the process, the British overlooked the threat from upgraded submarine technology to slow-moving convoys, and never considered the possibility that the Germans might develop night surface tactics for the U-boats. Moreover, the detection gear on which the British placed so much hope had many limitations, among them narrow operational areas, and the fact that it had been tested only in good weather for short periods of time. The equipment proved inadequate against the U-boats when war broke out, and it took nearly three years before the British and the Americans managed to get the upper hand in the battle of the Atlantic. Interestingly, the Germans themselves at the outbreak of the war underestimated the U-boat threat. The German navy, dominated by officers committed to battleships, saw no real decisive role for submarine warfare, and at the outbreak of war in 1939, the Germans had a grand total of 26 oceangoing submarines. Only with the realization that poorly-defined British convoys offered easy targets did Germany begin a serious submarine construction program.

To be continued . . .

Ernest Volkman is a writer on intelligence and national security affairs whose work has appeared in a wide variety of publications. Currently a Contributing Editor of Penthouse magazine, where he handles national security investigations, his reports on intelligence technology also appear in Military Science and Technology, and Defense Science magazines. A former prize-winning National Editor and National Correspondent for Newsday, Volkman is the author of Legacy of Hate, published in 1982. The Devil's Sabbath, his history of American intelligence operations, will be published by Morrow early in 1985.

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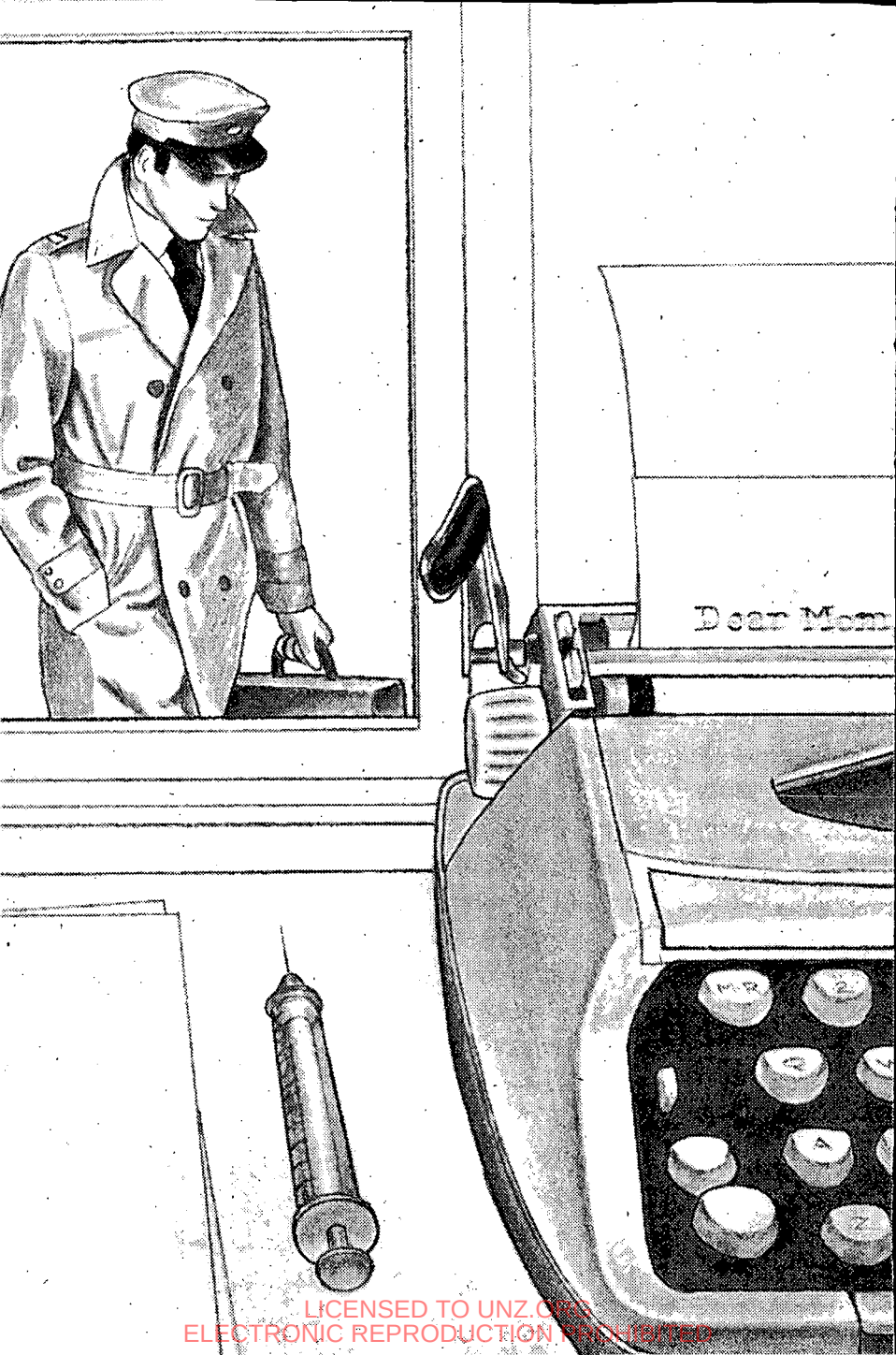

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THE SUSPECT SOLDIER

by Bill Knox

Boots crashed on the cobbles at the main gate of Edinburgh Castle as a squad of kilted infantry men went through the time-honoured routine of changing sentries.

A hundred yards away, in the cool gloom of the room in one of the castle's gray stone buildings, Cam Gordon frowned unhappily at the two uniformed men sitting opposite him. The red-tabbed brigadier carefully avoided his gaze by staring out of the narrow, high-set window opposite, while his companion, Captain Hatson of the Army's Special Investigation Branch, spent an unusually long time over lighting a cigarette.

It was Hatson who finally broke the silence. "It's never pleasant to be asked to spy on a friend," he murmured. "But in a situation like this, Gordon, the end justifies the means. We've got to know if we're right . . . if your friend Ewton is a traitor."

"The idea is crazy," said Cam Gordon, flatly.

"Is it?" asked Hatson. "Stranger things have happened. Think of the situation. Can you honestly blame us?"

Illustration by Bruce Baker

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Cam Gordon, nudging thirty years of age, a stockily built Scot with dark hair and the kind of face more likely to be called rugged than handsome, had to hesitate. Running Gordon Investigations, his own small private detective agency, he was used to receiving strange telephone calls. But the one from the Army S.I.B., summoning him from Glasgow to Edinburgh, had wakened plenty of old memories.

Now Hatson wanted him to think. Think. He'd been doing little else since he'd met the two Army men and heard their story.

It was more than a handful of years since he'd last seen Bob Ewton. At that time, Cam Gordon had been a junior infantry officer and Ewton had been a fresh-faced artillery second lieutenant. They'd served together in a couple of Middle East trouble spots, the kind where the British still sent in teams of what were politely termed "technical instructors." More than once, Cam had made sure the artilleryman kept his head down when the bullets came too close.

They kept in touch for a spell.

And now, Major Robert Ewton, second in command at an experimental proving unit at an Army firing range in East Lothian, seemed to be up to his neck in the worst kind of trouble.

The red-tabbed brigadier cleared his throat.

"You see, Gordon, while most people worry about H-bombs, we've got to be ready for the old-fashioned type of warfare. And this new gunsight outdates radar in the field. The gunsight registers on the second or so of heat-flash created when an enemy artillery piece fires, locks its own weapon on the position and range, and that's that."

Captain Hatson nodded. "Obviously, a number of security screened personnel know it exists and have something to do with handling it. But only a few know the way it works, and Major Ewton is one of them."

Cam had heard it already. The first hint had been in an agent's report that Iron Curtain technicians had been turned on to the task of masking heat-flash from guns. The obvious reason was a leak from the East Lothian testing ground, and the security mill had been grinding. Without surface sign, man after man in the unit had been cleared.

But Major Ewton now had a question mark beside his name.

How did it come about that a lump sum of five thousand

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pounds, in cash, had suddenly been deposited in his bank account, when, until then, he'd been comparatively short of funds? Then, why had his Norwegian wife Gerda made a sudden trip to Oslo and back, with the explanation that her father was ill, when a check had revealed that both her parents were in the best of health?

"All right," Cam made his decision. "I'll do it. But first, I'll have to think of a way to make contact."

The S.I.B. captain relaxed. "That's simple enough. In two days' time, on Saturday afternoon, Ewton's wife has entered her dog, a Dalmatian, for a championship show being held in Dunbar. Ewton will be with her, and the rest is up to you."

A steady downpour of rain was falling when Cam arrived in Dunbar on the show day. He parked his dark green Mercedes in a street nearby then walked along to the hall where the dog show was in progress.

Inside, he joined the crowd packed round the judging ring, then drifted his way casually along the fringe of spectators and into the area beyond. A seemingly endless array of animals was being brushed, combed, and otherwise prepared for their big moment.

There was only one Dalmatian — a lazy, yawning animal being tended by a tall, attractive brunette, who wore a tweed skirt and a heavy, white, fisherman-knit sweater. As he edged closer to the brunette, a hand suddenly gripped his arm.

"Since when were you interested in dogs?" demanded Bob Ewton. He laughed. "It's good to see you, Cam, but what are you doing in this part of the world?"

"Taking a few days holiday, Bob — and getting in some golf," said the young investigator, with suitable surprise. "How's everything?"

Ewton shrugged. "Not too bad. The Army doesn't change much under the surface." Then he brightened. "Interested in the Dalmatian? It's my wife's dog; I'm married now. Come and be introduced to the missus."

Gerda Ewton, only a faint trace of accent in her soft, pleasantly husky voice, greeted Cam in a cool but friendly fashion. "Bob has talked of you often, Mr. Gordon," she told him, while beside her the big Dalmatian stretched luxuriously. "Just now I must go for a little while; it is time I took Blot to the judging ring. But you will wait?"

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Her husband rubbed his chin. "Look, Cam, why not come home with us for a meal once this is over? We'd planned to stay and have a few drinks with some people, but this is an occasion. Gerda and I can make some diplomatic excuse or another, and then we can have the evening to ourselves."

"We would both like that," agreed the Norwegian girl.

"Then it's arranged," agreed Cam.

The two men watched as Gerda Ewton led the Dalmatian off towards the show ring and put it through its paces before the judges. Suddenly, Ewton nudged Cam. "Here's where I make those apologies," he murmured. "The tweedy character approaching; Captain Vallon, from the camp."

Cam turned slightly to one side as the newcomer, thin, brisk, and with a bushy moustache, greeted his friend. "Hello, Major. Mrs. Ewton's dog going to scoop the prize list, eh?"

Ewton shook his head. "I doubt it. Oh, Vallon — I'm sorry, but we're going to have to call off that drink we'd arranged with you and Doctor Loth. Gerda's got a bit of a headache, and we're leaving for home once this is over."

The other Army man shrugged. "Can't be helped, old boy. The Doc's around somewhere, but if you don't see him I'll explain."

As Vallon went off into the crowd again, Cam took out his cigarettes. "Who is Doctor Loth?" he queried, as they lit up.

Bob Ewton blew a smoke cloud ceilingwards. "An archaeologist. An interesting character. He got permission to dig a spot near the camp, and now he spends most of the week down great holes in the earth looking for traces of old Picts who used to run around these parts about 2,000 years ago."

A scattering of applause from the crowd brought their attention back to the showring, and a few moments later — the judging of the larger dogs class over — Gerda Ewton rejoined them, the Dalmatian ambling by her side. "A third place," she told them. "I had hoped for better but the judge, she is a . . . "

"I know the word, but never mind," soothed her husband. "Well, let's pack up and go." He began to put the dog brushes and equipment into a small canvas grip, then raised an eyebrow.

"Here comes Doctor Loth. Well, excuses ready, Gerda; you've got a headache!"

The archaeologist, small, middle-aged, wearing rimless glasses, bustled towards them, then frowned as Ewton made the same

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apologies as before. "A pity, a great pity," he declared. "I had been looking forward to our evening. Still, another time."

"Any new progress at the excavation site?" queried Ewton.

Doctor Loth shook his head. "It is a slow process, Major Ewton. This rain is an additional handicap, turning the earth to mud. Well, I will see you again."

As they reached the exit door, Gerda Ewton hesitated. "Bob, will you wait for me a moment? I have forgotten something." She thrust the Dalmatian's lead into her husband's hand and darted back into the crowded hall.

"Women — " sighed Ewton.

On a sudden impulse, Cam turned to the artilleryman. "I need some cigarettes," he declared. "There's a kiosk in the hall; I'll be right back."

Inside the hall again, he pushed his way through the crowd, trying to spot his friend's wife. Then, as he glimpsed her, he drew back behind a handy pillar.

Gerda Ewton was standing with Doctor Loth, and the middle-aged archaeologist had a cold frown on his face as he talked to her. As Cam watched, the girl bit her lip, then nodded. The archaeologist spoke again, then Gerda turned away, Cam pushed into the crowd once more. He was back with Bob Ewton when she rejoined them.

"Now that we're finally ready," said Ewton with mild sarcasm, "where's your car parked, Cam?"

"Why don't you go along with Mr. Gordon?" suggested his wife. "I'll take the shooting brake, and I can get a few things in the grocer's shop on the way."

"Sounds sensible," agreed her husband.

On the journey out to the artillery camp, Ewton sat back in the Mercedes' passenger seat and talked reasonably freely. "I've always liked the Army," he mused. "But, well, lately I've been wondering if it isn't time I got out. Gerda would like it — a permanent home of our own and all that goes with it."

"And more money," suggested Cam casually. "Even on today's Army pay scale, there's not much chance of putting money in the bank."

He sensed the artilleryman's sharp glance, but Ewton made no reply. Conversation seemed to "dry up" after that.

They were first to arrive at the cottage, and Gerda Ewton didn't

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arrive until half an hour later.

"A puncture," she explained. "But now, I get our meal."

Cam looked out of the cottage window. The rain had stopped, but the ground was dark and wet. Gerda Ewton's shooting brake was parked just outside, the tyres stained with a red mud clay.

He watched her over the meal. She was outwardly cheerful, but he felt that she was partly acting, covering up a nervous tension.

Once they'd finished and the table had been cleared, she turned to her husband: "Bob, I have a letter to write; can I use your typewriter? It will give you a chance to talk with Mr. Gordon."

"Help yourself," agreed Ewton.

For the next half hour, he and Cam talked of their old Army days together, then Gerda Ewton joined them.

"Letter finished?" queried the artilleryman.

She nodded. "I will post it later. Another drink, Mr. Gordon?"

Before Cam could answer, the telephone in the hall beyond began ringing.

"I'll get it," volunteered Ewton, rising from his chair. He went out, closing the room door behind him.

Cam heard the muffled sound of his voice, the "ting" as the receiver was replaced, then Ewton re-entered the room. His expression had changed, and he ground out the butt of a cigarette in the nearest ashtray with unnecessary violence.

"I've got to go out. Something has turned up at the camp," he told them. "Sorry we've got to cut this short, Cam."

Cam rose. "That's all right. I'm in Dunbar for a few days, and you know the hotel. We'll get together."

Ewton nodded. "Oh, Gerda, I'll post that letter for you on the way. I'll change into uniform now."

His wife hesitated, then agreed. "I'll get it."

A few minutes later, Cam drove back to Dunbar and went to his hotel room, puzzling over what might be the best next move to make. He gave up after a spell, went down to the lounge, and settled in to watch television, a lager at his elbow. He wasn't left undisturbed for long. A waiter came across and called him to the telephone. Cam took the call in the box beside the reception desk.

"Cam . . . it's Bob Ewton," crackled the voice over the line, a voice with a note of desperate urgency. "Look, I can't explain now, but I need help, and there's nobody else I can ask. Can you

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come straight out? Something's happened to Gerda!"

The dark green Mercedes ate the dozen or so miles to the outskirts of the artillery camp in record time, and Cam Gordon braked the car to a sliding stop outside the Ewtons' cottage. As he got out, Major Ewton came down the garden path towards him, his tired-lined face now grey with anxiety.

"What's happened, Bob?"

"I . . . I don't know, Cam," declared the artilleryman. "They . . . they warned me they'd do it, but I didn't believe them."

"Let's get back inside." Cam guided his friend into the cottage.

The neat, tidy living-room he'd seen less than two hours before now looked as if it had been the scene of a full-scale brawl. Chairs were overturned, ornaments smashed, and across the width of the light blue carpet there was an ominous dark red trail of blood. The Ewtons' Dalamatian dog, Blot, was curled tight in one corner, whining feebly.

"Called the police?" asked Cam.

Ewton shook his head. "I can't. Not yet, Cam . . . for Gerda's sake, I can't."

Cam sighed. "Let's get down to cases. Who are *they*?"

The artilleryman bit his lip. "That's just it; I don't know!"

Cam looked him straight in the face. "I'm going to be level with you, and take a chance, Bob. The only reason I was at the dog show today was to contact you," said Cam, quietly. "The Army sent me, Bob; because we were friends; because they're in a panic over a leakage about a certain gunsight."

"You mean they think I'm selling out?" Ewton's voice was bitter. "Why?"

"For a start, five thousand pounds in your bank account," Cam told him. "But right now, let's worry about Gerda."

Ewton said: "It began a month ago, with a telephone call. A man's voice said I'd better meet him. He said it involved Gerda, so I went. You see, Gerda isn't Norwegian by birth. She was one of a batch of refugee kids given homes by Norwegians — her parents got her out of the Baltic states but had to stay behind. Now, well, let's say they're still on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain. In some people's narrow view, she might rate as a poor security risk, especially when her husband is in a top secret experimental unit."

"And the Army doesn't know?"

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Ewton shook his head. "When we married, I wasn't connected with secret stuff, and she had a Norwegian passport. There didn't seem any need to tell. Anyway, I went to the meeting place, a pub in Edinburgh, and met the man. He came right to the point; they wanted me to start feeding them information. When I told him what to do, he said I'd already been paid for it . . . asked me how the army would react if they knew about Gerda, and that there was five thousand in my bank account. They'd paid the money in that day!"

Cam gave a soft whistle. "A nasty spot for anyone," he agreed.

Two weeks after the Edinburgh meeting, Ewton had been contacted again — and had stalled for time, pretending to be ready to agree.

"The man I'd met was obviously only a messenger. I'd a crazy idea that if I found out who the big boy was, and turned the lot over to security, then Gerda and I would be cleared," declared the artilleryman.

"That phone call this evening was for another meeting. The same man turned up, and said they wanted details of the gunsight or Gerda would suffer."

Cam nodded slowly. "How about the information they've already gathered, Bob? Who gave them it?"

Ewton flushed. "I didn't — and Gerda wouldn't. Anyway, she knows next to nothing about it, and I don't talk shop at home. Cam, what can I do?"

"For a start, think. If you hadn't met me, you'd both have spent the evening in town, right? And your friends would be thorough enough to know that," mused Cam. "Yet you told only two people: Captain Vallon and the archaeologist, Dr. Loth. Let's start with Loth."

He spotted something on the carpet, half-hidden by a chair, and stooped to pick it up . . . a small piece of torn, bloodstained cloth, heavy and coarse.

"Don't worry too much about Gerda, Bob. Somebody was bleeding when they left here, but it looks to me as if your dog sank his teeth into one of your visitors, and got thumped on the head for his pains. Come on," said Cam, heading for the door. "It's still not too late to pay a call. Let's see how Loth reacts. After that, we'll check on Vallon."

Dr. Loth had been in the area about three months, explained

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Bob Ewton, as Cam hurried the Mercedes in the direction of the archaeologist's camp. He had permission from a local landowner to investigate an area of wild hillside believed to have been the site of a Pictish village.

The sun was low on the horizon as, Ewton directing, Cam steered the car off the main road, bounced it along a rough track, and finally halted at the archaeologist's camp.

"Been here before?" asked Cam, softly.

"Once," agreed Ewton. "He has half a dozen men working during the week, navvies hired for the heavy digging. He and a couple of assistants take over when the delicate work begins." Ewton stiffened. "There's Loth, coming from his tent."

"Just introduce me," murmured Cam. "Say I wanted to see a digging site, and keep quiet after that."

The small, middle-aged doctor waited while they approached. "Major Ewton! I didn't expect you here tonight. How is your wife?"

Bob Ewton mumbled that Gerda was feeling a little better, then introduced Cam.

"Of course," beamed Dr. Loth. "You are welcome, Mr. Gordon, though I am afraid that so far we have made no great discoveries. A digging project is a matter of luck, following clues, not knowing whether it will take days or months to strike the correct solution. Perhaps you understand the difficulties of such an investigation?"

The words were innocent, but they might mean something. Cam kept his own manner equally friendly. "What do you hope to locate, Dr. Loth?"

"Traces of people who were here before the Roman invasion," said the other man. "So far, we have a few pieces of crude pottery, some bones, similar things."

They strolled towards the tents. Casually, Cam halted by the nearest, lifted the flap, and peered in. The interior was filled with digging tools.

"What's in the other tents?" he asked.

"Two are living accommodation; one for myself, the other for my assistants," said the archaeologist. "The hired men travel here daily. The fourth tent I use as an office."

"Mind if I see?" Without waiting, Cam strode round the canvas tents, looking into each with an air of curiosity.

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"Very interesting," he agreed, his eyes flashing a negative signal towards Bob Ewton. "The Major wasn't sure whether you'd be here or not, Dr. Loth. He thought you might be staying in town."

The archaeologist sniffed in frosty fashion.

"That was so, Mr. Gordon. But when Captain Vallon told me he had to return urgently to camp, I was left alone. I decided to come back here. My two assistants are due back shortly. In fact, I plan to have supper waiting for them."

There was no invitation to stay to share the supper. Cam and Bob Ewton said goodbye, returned to the car, and drove back through the mud to the main road.

"What do you think?" The artillery major's expression was strained as his companion sat back in the driving seat.

"Everything seemed as it should. He could be lying — but why should Captain Vallon have to return so urgently to camp, so soon after you told him you wouldn't be staying in town? What's Vallon's job at the experimental range?"

"Attached to singlas," growled Ewton. "He was posted here about three months ago, after a spell of duty in Malaya; at least, that's what he told me."

"Let's find out if he did go back to the range," said Cam, his eyes hard. "If not, then an interesting situation could exist." His foot pressed down on the accelerator and the car surged forward.

Ten mintues later, they reached the high-fenced boundary of the experimental range and slowed to a halt at the main gate. The armed sentry snapped a salute as he recognised the artilleryman.

"Evening, sir. Lucky you turned up. There's an officer just arrived in the guardroom looking for you."

"Captain Vallon?" queried Ewton.

The sentry shook his head. "Haven't seen him all evening, sir."

They left the car and went into the guardroom. A khaki-clad officer turned from the telephone as they entered. Cam felt an immediate foreboding. It was Captain Hatson, the Special Investigation Branch man, who had launched him on the case.

"Captain — "

Hatson ignored him. "Major Ewton, you're under arrest," he snapped. "I don't think I need to tell you the charges."

Bob Ewton's mouth fell open and he stood, too stunned to reply.

"Captain, I think you're making a mistake," said Cam. "We

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came here looking for an officer called Vallon. He's the one who may have questions to answer."

Hatson shook his head. "Sorry, Gordon. Vallon is one of my men. He's been working undercover here on special security ever since the gunsight project began." He turned towards Ewton. "Major, do you deny posting a letter this evening?"

"No." Bob Ewton was bewildered. "It was my wife's — why?"

"The letter was typewritten," said Hatson, grimly. "It contained a microdot message on the heat-flash sight. Where is your wife?"

"That's why we came," Cam told him. "Vallon may know."

Captain Hatson shook his head. "That's no help, Gordon. Vallon's in the hospital with a fractured skull, unconscious — and not expected to live."

"What happened to Vallon?" demanded Cam. "And this letter; are you sure it is the one posted by Major Ewton?"

Captain Hatson leaned back against the guardroom wall, his face grim and angry. "That we found Vallon was sheer luck. He was dumped from a car on a side road five miles from here, thrown into a patch of bushes. He'd probably have died there, undiscovered, if a poacher out with his dog hadn't seen the car stop and gone over afterwards to find out what was going on. If Vallon dies, it's murder.

"Vallon telephoned me twice this evening. The first time he reported that you, Major Ewton, had taken Gordon to your home. The second time he said he'd seen you leave the house and post the letter, and that he was going to follow you. Well, we got the letter, addressed to Norway."

The S.I.B. man turned to Cam. "You know the microdot technique?"

Cam nodded. "Microscopic photographs. You cut the final print with the point of a hypodermic needle, stick it on a typewritten letter, and it is the same size as a full stop. At the other end, they enlarge the photograph back to regular size."

"We've already done that," said Captain Hatson. "It contained details of last week's test programme on the gunsight. Can you explain that, Major?"

Bob Ewton stood silent.

"I saw Bob being handed that letter by his wife," said Cam, quietly. "But don't jump to conclusions. I did that once already

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today, about Captain Vallon, and was wrong."

Quickly, he sketched Bob Ewton's story for the S.I.B. man — and Captain Hatson listened, his manner thawing a little. "If this is true, you were in a difficult situation, Major," he admitted.

Cam continued: "Let's tackle another angle. After I met the Ewtons at the dog show, Gerda Ewton went back in the hall, saying she'd forgotten something. I went in after her, and saw her talking with Dr. Loth. Then she drove home on her own, while Bob came with me. She was late arriving, and said the car had had a puncture. The wheels were covered in a red mud, the same red mud that's on my tyres now, and we've just come from Dr. Loth's digging site. The soil around here is grey, unless you've dug down really deep!"

Bob Ewton puzzled over the point. "Cam, when I got the phone message arranging that meeting tonight, the man mentioned you by name. He told me 'get rid of your old army pal, Gordon'."

"Then he had to be working with Dr. Loth!" exclaimed Cam. "Gerda must have told Loth, then Loth told the man who contacted you."

"Which brings your wife back in the picture again," said the S.I.B. man, with grave emphasis. "I'm sorry, Major Ewton."

"What do we know about Dr. Loth?" demanded Cam.

Captain Hatson shrugged. "He seems all right. Vallon checked on him when he arrived, and his archaeology background is genuine. Vallon became quite friendly with him and is often at his dig."

"Has he said if there's an underground house, or is Dr. Loth still trying to locate it!"

"Oh, it was found, almost a hundred years ago; just about the same time as another was located at Crichton, in Midlothian. I looked up the reference books when I heard about Loth's plan. There's a regular underground rabbit warren on the hillside."

"Which he carefully avoided mentioning," rapped Cam. "Is Major Ewton still under arrest?"

Captain Hatson hesitated. "Let's say he's still being questioned," he compromised.

"And the gunsight information which has been escaping isn't fully detailed?"

The S.I.B. man shook his head.

"The answer could be underground at the Pict's house. Gerda

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Ewton could be there, too." Cam turned towards the door. "Shall we find out?"

Captain Hatson reached over to the weapons rack beside him, took a revolver, handed a second pistol to Cam, hesitated, then chose a Sterling machine-pistol and deliberately gave it to Ewton.

It was late dusk by the time they reached the archaeology camp. Cam pulled the Mercedes off the road a good quarter mile away, switched off the engine, and grinned at his two companions. "Ready for a long, muddy walk?"

Together they trudged the remaining distance across the hillside while the night grew steadily darker. A twin twinkle of lights ahead marked where the camp tents were situated.

"There's someone over by the nearest tent," hissed Captain Hatson. "He moved in between us and the light."

They crawled nearer, until the figure was plainly visible: a tall thin man smoking a cigarette as he strolled casually around the mounds of dug-up earth.

"Guard duty. I'll take him," murmured the S.I.B. man, wriggling forward.

His khaki uniform blended into the night, and they lost trace of him within a moment or two. Then, from on ahead, they heard a faint thud and a grunt. Soon, Hatson reappeared, dragging his quarry by the heels. The stranger was already coming round. Cam clapped a hand over the man's mouth to stifle his groaning, then held the barrel of his borrowed army revolver close under the man's nose.

"One shout and I'll thump you with this," he warned, letting the cold metal touch the man's skin. "Is Mrs. Ewton down there?"

The man gulped. "Never heard of her."

"No?" Cam gripped the man's arm, saw him wince, and suddenly pulled the man's sleeve up over his elbow. A white bandage was round the stranger's forearm.

"The Ewton's dog has sharp teeth," murmured Cam. "Now listen. I'm not with the army, so I don't have to obey rules. I'm going to gag you, and then I'm going to leave you alone with Major Ewton — and he doesn't feel like obeying rules either."

"She's in the Pict's house. She's . . . she's okay," said the man quickly.

"Who are you? One of Loth's 'assistants'?" prodded Cam. "Loth and your running-mate, are they down with her?"

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The man nodded.

"How do we get in?"

"Through the main stores tent; wooden hatch under a groundsheet."

"Is that the only way?" growled Captain Hatson.

Their prisoner hesitated, then, as Bob Ewton pressed still closer, he shook his head. "Escape hole in a clump of bushes thirty yards over on the right."

"I'll go in the back way," said Cam. "Hatson, you and Ewton give me a couple of minutes, then come in via the tent hatch. Got a torch?"

Hatson handed over a small pen-light. "You take it. There's bound to be a lamp of some kind in those tents."

Cam headed off in the direction indicated. The patch of bushes was easy enough to find but the escape hole leading to the prehistoric hideaway was more difficult.

At last he found it, a dark, narrow gap almost jammed by foliage, and wriggled through, flashing the pen-torch beam for a second to get his bearings.

Beyond, he heard a murmer of voices, but it was still pitch dark, and another torch-flash showed he was in an L-shaped room about eight feet broad. A green canvas sheet covered a bulking mass to one side. Cam lifted the canvas, flashed the torch, and gave a satisfied grin. He crept a little further, and a pale light gleamed ahead.

At a small table, beside a bottled gas lantern, Dr. Loth talked quietly to another man. Nearby, Gerda Ewton lay on the stone floor, her back propped against the rough wall, one hand and foot tied close together.

Any moment . . . Cam jerked as, instead of the two Army men pouring down from the other end, there was a muffled shot, a second, and then a short, staccato burst. Dr. Loth and his companion sprang to their feet, their eyes turned towards the tent-hatch, a small black automatic appearing like magic in the archaeologist's hand.

"Stay right where you are; don't spoil the picture." Cam stepped out from cover, the army revolver, massive by comparison, glinting in the lamplight.

Loth grunted, whirled — and Cam squeezed the trigger. The army .38 roared, echoing like thunder in the boulderstone

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chamber. The bullet hit Loth high in the leg and he tumbled, dropping the automatic.

Seconds later, Bob Ewton burst into the underground room, the Sterling gun ready. "Okay, Cam?" he demanded. Then, as Cam nodded, he crossed over to his wife. A little slower, his left arm hanging limp, Captain Hatson appeared behind him.

"The contact man arrived just as we were coming down, Gordon," he winced. "The Sterling fixed him. Thanks, Major Ewton."

Bob Ewton used a pen-knife to cut his wife's bonds, then glanced over at their prisoners.

"Feel all right, Mrs. Ewton?" said Cam.

The brunette nodded. "Now, yes."

"Want to talk about it?"

"Let it wait — " began her husband.

She shook her head. "It is better now, Bob. These men tell me unless I help them they let the army know I am not Norwegian, that I am a refugee, with relatives behind the Iron Curtain. They said this would get you into serious trouble, even court martial. So I take letters they give me, put them in our envelopes, and send them to my adopted parents in Oslo. They know I am in some kind of trouble and give the letters to a man who calls."

"And I can guess where the letters go from there," growled Captain Hatson. The S.I.B. man frowned. "Mrs. Ewton, did you tell them anything about the gunsight?"

"No — because I knew nothing," she told him. "Tonight they come to the house and take me to here. I struggled and Blot tried to help me . . . "

"The dog's alright," said Cam. "Captain, there's a load of short-wave receiving equipment in this place. All they had to do was monitor the WT chit-chat going on when an experimental shoot was underway at the range."

Bob Ewton gave a curse. "We should have thought of that. They're near enough to pick up short-range transmissions, and the same trick has been worked abroad, on the frontiers, by both sides. They'd get some stuff that way, and they planned to squeeze the rest of the information out of me." He turned to the S.I.B. man. "What happens about Gerda, Captain?"

Hatson rubbed his chin. "I'll work on that; but it won't be drastic, I promise." †

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TWICE REMOVED

by John Lutz

My name is Lockwood. I'm a realist. I have to be, where I'm going. Ackerley has hired me to do this sort of thing before, but my instincts tell me that it's never been as important as this job.

Don't ask me why the job is necessary. Don't even ask me who I'm working for. Oh, sure, Ackerley hired me, but I don't know who he's working for. So I'm twice removed, you might say, from the source of my instructions. Considering the nature of my work, it's better that way.

The DC-10 touches down on the runway with a faint screech of rubber, and within minutes I've deplaned and am walking through the terminal building toward the baggage claim area. When I've picked up my tan leather suitcase with its brass locks, I carry it in one hand, my attache case in the other, and make my way outside where I can get a cab.

After checking into a midtown hotel under an assumed name, I unpack, pour myself a drink from my silver travel flask, then sit down to examine the contents of the envelope in my attache case. Some brief typed instructions are in the envelope, along with some added bits of information that might be useful. There is even a key to Garth's apartment. The people I work for are unfailingly thorough.

Garth is a fry cook at a small hamburger joint in the downtown area. His hours are from noon until nine o'clock, taking in both the lunch and supper crowd. He won't be home now. I leave the hotel and take a cab to within a block of his apartment, then walk the rest of the way.

Illustration by Aries

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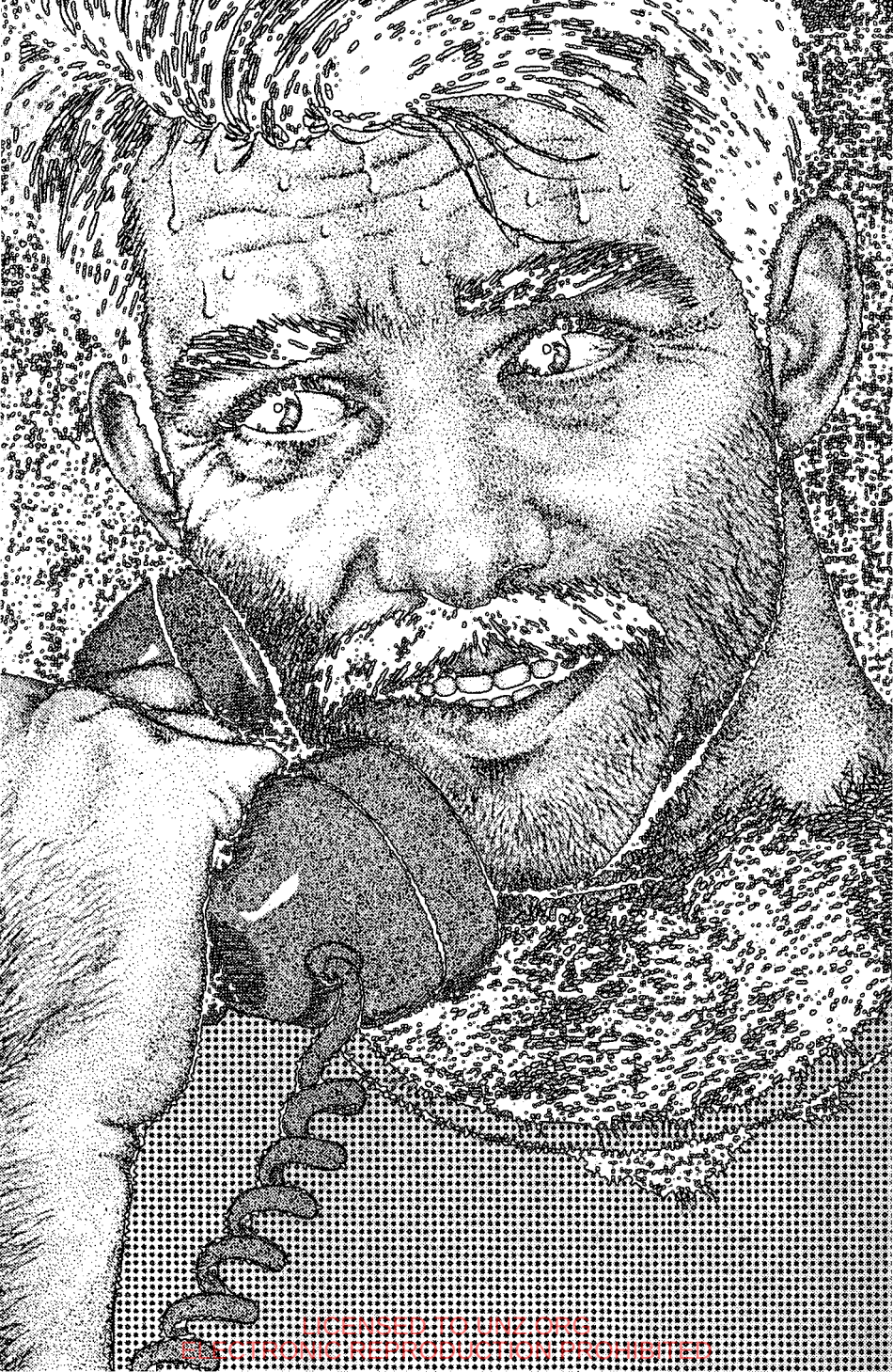

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The building where Garth lives is large and in bleak disrepair. There is a child's rusted tricycle near a heavy wood door with a cracked circular window. As I climb the concrete steps toward the entrance, I see that some of the windows in the looming brick face of the building have been boarded up, and most of the other windows display only lowered yellowed shades. The neighborhood, the building, is inhabited by people who prefer that their misery be private, who neither ask nor answer questions. Doubtless, this is one of the reasons Garth was chosen.

The vestibule is profaned by crude graffiti. No one sees me as I walk up the stairs to the fifth floor, down the long faded hall to apartment 5-E, and push the button beside the tarnished doorknob. There is no answer; the bell tolls inside like the muted distress signal of something lost. After a few silent minutes, I unlock the door and enter.

The apartment consists of a living room, bedroom and small bathroom. It conforms exactly to the floor plan I memorized. But the floor plan didn't show the filth, the many empty beer cans, the stacks of newspapers, the moldy bread on the sink counter, the unmade bed with its soiled sheets, the disarray of paperback books in a corner. On a stand, near the foot of the bed, is a small portable TV with a long kinked antenna, like that of an alert insect. My teeth are tightly clenched as I begin to look around more closely.

Most of the paperback books are of a sociological nature. In a shallow desk drawer are dozens of newspaper clippings concerning Daniels and the campaign. On one of the bedroom walls is stapled a lewd poster of a young blonde, and next to it on the wall are scrawled the words KISS, KISS in what appears to be black crayon.

Then I make my most important discovery: a diary. Almost every page is filled, in the same childish scrawling as the letters on the wall. It is quite a personal diary. I get out my instant-developing camera and photograph each page, then take a few shots of the apartment. After making sure that everything is as I found it, I leave and return to my hotel.

At midnight, I dial Luther Garth's number. He answers sleepily after the tenth ring.

"This is Mitchell," I say. "I wrote another letter last Friday but the time for threats is past. The time for action has arrived."

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There is a low gasp on the other end of the line. "Who is this?"

"It's us. We know it's kill or submit, kill or submit, kill $\frac{1}{1}$ "

"Who *is* this?" Fear makes Garth's voice small.

"Time for a noble act, a healing act, a glorious act — "

Garth hangs up.

I replace the receiver in its cradle and light a cigarette. The call is a good beginning. I know my job; I've been carefully briefed by the psychiatrists. Mitchell is Garth's middle name.

The next day, I again let myself into Garth's apartment. Under yesterday's date, I make a few brief entries in the diary in Garth's crude and childish scrawl.

That evening, I have supper at the diner where Garth works, and as I eat my hamburger and french fried potatoes, I catch sight of him in the kitchen beyond the serving shelf. He is a slender young man, with a shock of reddish hair and small, bewildered blue eyes. To a stout man, who is obviously the diner's owner or manager, I complain quietly about my hamburger being burned. I hear him pass the complaint on to Garth in the kitchen. Voices are raised, and the stout man calls Garth a psycho. Beautiful!

"He called us a psycho," I say to Garth on the telephone that evening, at midnight. "I could kill the fat scum, but why should we? He's nothing — the symptom, not the disease."

Garth doesn't hang up. He can't. I hear his breath hissing into the receiver. Like escaping steam under great pressure.

"The blonde girl spat on us," I say. "She could have refused me politely, but she laughed and then she spat on you. We won't have to remember *that*. Or have you already forgotten? We'll write it down then forget it. She's like the rest of them who laugh at me, who underestimate us. But they'll find out they're wrong. Soon."

"I want to know who this is!" Garth cries, in a tight, pleading voice."

"The only cure for some diseases is to kill them before they spread."

I hear Garth sobbing quietly.

"There are certain people who are like individual cancerous cells."

The sobbing continues. Deep sobbing, punctuated by choked inhalations.

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"There is a limit to what we'll take, to how much contagion you'll put up with before we do something noble, something healing, something glorious."

There is a click on the other end of the line and the connection is broken. I listen for a few seconds to the lonely, static sound in the receiver before hanging up.

Within less than two weeks, Garth actually comes to accept "Mitchell's" late night calls as routine, sage communications from his other self, the self who wrote in the diary and sent letters and thought the secret thoughts. The psychiatrists were right when they told Ackerley that it would be easy, that it would be inevitable. It dismays me, somehow, that anyone can know that about a man, even so obvious a psychopath as Garth. But Garth is mine now, and I know what to do with him.

On the thirteenth of the month, he is fired from his job. Apparently something was bothering Garth. He appeared tired all the time, was irritable and too preoccupied to perform his work. Hamburgers were burned; orders were confused. The stout man had to pay him off and tell him not to return. The dismissal is an unexpected development that will make my own job easier.

I have only two more days.

When Garth goes out for lunch the next afternoon, I let myself into the apartment and make lengthy, incendiary entries in the diary. I pin several of the newspaper clippings from the desk drawer over the poster of the blonde, then cross out each letter S in the words KISS, KISS and replace each with an L scrawled in black crayon. Then I lay the untraceable .38 Smith & Wesson revolver on top of the diary.

I phone Garth that evening and talk about us buying the gun. At first he doesn't remember, doesn't know what I'm talking about. Then he does recall buying the revolver, and remembers why we bought it.

I phone him several times in the early hours of the next morning.

At noon, I pack, check out of the hotel, and take a cab to the airport. There is nothing I can do now but wait and see if I've succeeded.

By the time the plane lands, the news is out. Senator Bradley Daniels and his pretty blonde wife, Gloria, have been shot and killed at a shopping center political rally, where the senator was

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trying to muster support for his campaign for the Presidency of the United States. The assassin, Luther Mitchell Garth, is in custody, claiming that he has been used and was the pawn of a conspiracy. At this point, however, officials have no reason to believe that he hasn't acted alone. The evidence is overwhelming that Garth is, not surprisingly, insane, and that his denials of sole guilt are nothing more than the ravings of a madman, perhaps a multiple personality. His apartment, the venomous entries in his diary, seem to confirm this. His is a classic case.

A week has passed. Ackerley is pleased. His employer is no doubt pleased. Whoever clandestinely chose Garth's letter, from the many threatening letters Presidential candidate Daniels routinely turned over to the authorities, must be pleased. And why not? It was a professional job, and on a rather grand scale.

I'm waiting now, in the usual place in the park, for Ackerley to pay me. And here he comes, a tall man with one shoulder noticeably higher than the other, walking with his customary, unhurried, deliberate gait. But there is someone with him this time, a short man in a light tan jacket. It isn't like Ackerley to bring company. I am curious, and slightly annoyed.

When the two men draw nearer, I see the way the man in the tan jacket is looking at me — warily, yet with a total disregard for how I am looking at him. Almost as if I'm inanimate. Fear drops through me like a wedge of ice.

"Congratulations," Ackerley says. "You have moved history." He is carrying the leather briefcase from which he usually pays me.

I nod, watching the man in the tan jacket watch me.

Ackerley sighs sadly, the sigh of a man taking a regrettable but necessary precaution. The short man draws a silenced automatic from beneath his jacket.

"Mr. Lockwood," Ackerley says, "there is a darker history of this world that must never be written."

I attempt to shout, but the silenced automatic jumps twice in the short man's hand, making two quick coughing sounds, like strangled laughter.

As I lay dying, watching the two men walk away, I concede through my agony that my killing was a neat, professional job. Ackerley must be pleased.

And no doubt his employer will be pleased. †

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GAME

TRIVIA

1- "Where the Spies Are," an MGM feature film made in 1966, featured which international leading man as its hero, Dr. Jason Love?

2- Which famous spy novelist criticized James Bond thusly: " . . . Bond himself would be what I would describe as the ideal defector. Because if the money was better, the booze freer, the women easier over there in Moscow, he'd be off like a shot and defect to the Russians. Bond, you see, is the ultimate prostitute."?

3- Tiger Mann, O.S.S. agent, was created by which famous mystery/detective series novelist?

4- Which famous spy novelist wrote a cooking feature column for the British newspaper, "The Observer," during the 1960s?

5- He is a fictional agent for the American Intelligence Agency (A.I.A.), and has been — at various times — a doctor, a dentist, a lawyer, and an honorary Indian chief; a professional boxer, a ballet dancer, and an acrobat; an Olympic champion in Grecian wrestling, dueling, fencing, and the military pentathlon. He has a Black Belt in Judo, is highly skilled as a frogman, renowned as an artist, known as an accomplished musician, is a scientist and scientific-journal-writer, is fluent in 42 languages and dialects, and is overwhelmingly successful with women. Who is this 20th Century paragon of American manhood?

Please turn to page 161 for the correct answers to these questions.

CIPHER

A cryptogram is a cipher, and a cipher is just a problem begging to be solved — all it takes is brain power, intuition, and a dogged determination to succeed. Since these characteristics pretty well describe ESPIONAGE readers, we thought we'd give you a little cipher to dwell on.

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PAGES

CIPHER #2

RNAJB	JZNOW	PFANJ	WVQNN	ZJRKQ	BFATQ
LVCFN	HAWYR	BPTRT	BVFJM	YAKWQ	SAQPP
AVFJM	HAJLJ	MPCRG	QERAT	ZLZQN	SQWTS
LTQQK	FAVZQ	BPPSQ	REYFE	HAVZQ	YVZPY
SBYZQ	CFVNJ	XSZYF	PTYRN	VQMQL	RXQKQ
NSQSR	XJVYP	ZPWBF	AVZQM	YFEHA	STWBA
NEKQT	QNNSQ	SGQVZ	QSPJJ	CZSXS	VZQSG
GYPRS	WPSGQ	MQYDS	JPPJN	QNNAH	NANTN
QMQFR	AWPWO	NYRML	JMQNN	FRWYX	VHFBF
QTQQS	PJJCZ	PYXYY	TNEQN	XLMKJ	JKQKF
AVZLT	EBVQN	NVQMQ	LRXLT	KWOCQ	

Although solving a cipher is its own reward, we're adding an incentive: The first three readers to submit the correct solution to this cipher, will receive a free, one-year subscription to ESPIONAGE Magazine. Simply address your solutions to ESPIONAGE Magazine Cipher Contest, P.O. Box 1184, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Solution to Cipher #1: (December 1984 issue)

The city of Ashkabad developed around a Russian fortress built to guard the crossroads of caravan routes on an oasis irrigated by a small river flowing from Kopetgad. The name was changed to Poltoratsk in honor of the Peoples' Commissar Polporatsky who was murdered by counter-revolutionaries. An earthquake on the night of six Oct., one-nine-four-eight, almost completely destroyed the city. It was rebuilt as a modern town. The city is the seat of some three-zero institutes of the Turkmenistan Acadmeny of Sciences. In May one-nine-six-two, the waters of Amu Darya reached the city via a new canal. Near the city, archaeologists are working to uncover the secrets of Nisa, the old capital of Parthia.

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R A O S H A M A R K R L L I R T U X O
E V A S I O N P Z F I L E X K S V E D
N C E V I E C E D A S I C L E H A R Y
A I N F O R M A N T K A F C C A A E R
P A H E N A N E R R H B U I T E D H E
Y L P F G G R V E A T R O U U U V P T
V E O U E I H M E I I N F S M D E I S
K S A R N K L I A T L A Z A G E N C Y
F I R E K I L L Y O A M A F N P T I M
P M A S N U N D E R C O V E R B U R S
K O I T C Y V V R T O T F H C U R D T
N R E M Z A R X S L N E N O X V E E U
E P G K A E R H T E U I H U T B S F N
E M A I S V A C G B S Y O S M O L E R
T O N B M S L A U S R M M E D P P C Z
M C O V E R T K A S S I G N M E N T A
P O I I R E M S H R V S R U K R F C S
B D P V R N S M A I L S I L O I S E U
B E S C L A N D E S T I N E Z L L P S
O C E E S I U G S I D O S S I E R S B
A S D A C T X H A C O N H U C R E U L
T A I Z B L O I S R N I R O N L A S D

SPY SEARCH

ADVENTURE
AGENCY
ASSASSIN
ASSIGNMENT
CIPHER
CLANDESTINE
CODE
COMPROMISE
COVERT
DANGER
DECEIVE
DEFECT
DISGUISE
DOSSIER
ESPIONAGE
EVASION
FILE
INFORMANT
INTELLIGENCE
KILL
KREMLIN
MISSION
MOLE
MYSTERY
OBSERVE
PERIL
RISK
SAFE HOUSE
SECRET AGENT
SECURITY
SUSPECT
TRAITOR
UNDERCOVER

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Solution to puzzle EC-1, page 158, December 1984 issue

1	2	3	4	5
the	history	of	the	stars
and	stripes	has	become	xxxx
xxxx	cluttered	with	tradition	and
myth	xxxx	so	that	it
is	virtually	impossible	to	state
the	facts	objectively	it	is
impossible	to	say	who	designed
the	first	xxxx	American	flag
or	whether	it	was	ever
actually	flown	in	any	battle
on	sea	or	land	during
the	conflict	in	fact	Washington
didn't	receive	his	xxxx	stars
and	stripes	until	1783	after
the	war	was	over	

a) Message reads from left to right

b) XXXX is a blank spot used to trouble the cryptanalyst

c) Message is transmitted by writing out the columns (top to bottom) in the following order: 3-2-4-1-5

Solution to TRIVIA questions on page 158.

1- David Niven.

2- John Le Carré, "Ian Fleming: The Spy Who Came In With the Gold," by Henry Zieger.

3- Mickey Spillane.

4- Len Deighton. This feature column provided the inspiration for "Len Deighton's Cookstrip Cook Book," published in 1965.

5- Derek Flint, created by Jack Pearl.

These trivia questions came from data found in "The Cold War File" by Andy East (The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 1983).

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ESPIONAGE™
MAGAZINE

Coming Next Issue...
April 1985

Interview With Ernest Volkman

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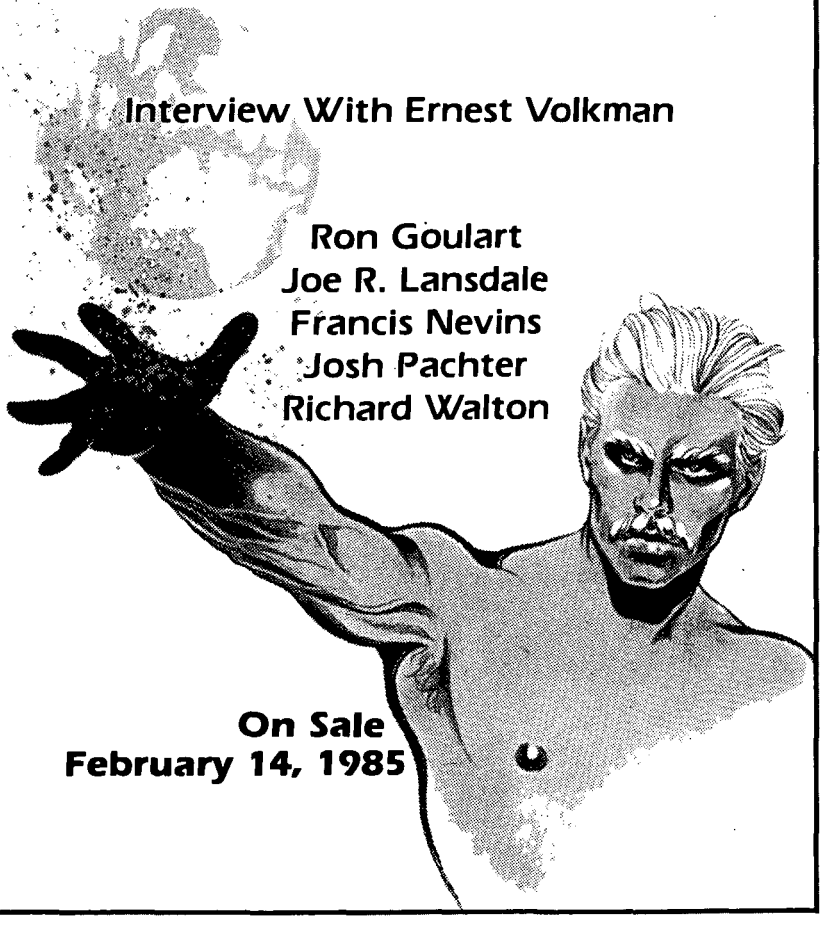

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02406 CC $1.95

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Ron Goulart
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EDITORIAL...

There aren't too many thrills that equal that of giving birth to a new magazine...especially a new magazine that is also the start of a new genre! We are in this fortunate position — deliberately — because we, the publishers and editors of ESPIONAGE, *love* spy stories...can't get enough of them. And can't always find the time to read a novel — almost their only presentation to date!

We love mystery/detective and science fiction stories as well, and therefore you will occasionally find a spy/sci fi (couldn't resist the rhyme!) or a spy/mystery story mixed in among the pure-bred espionage pieces that we'll be presenting to you six times a year (to start).

We hope that you love spy stories. And we hope that you'll love ESPIONAGE Magazine, too.

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ESPIONAGE
MAGAZINE

December 1984

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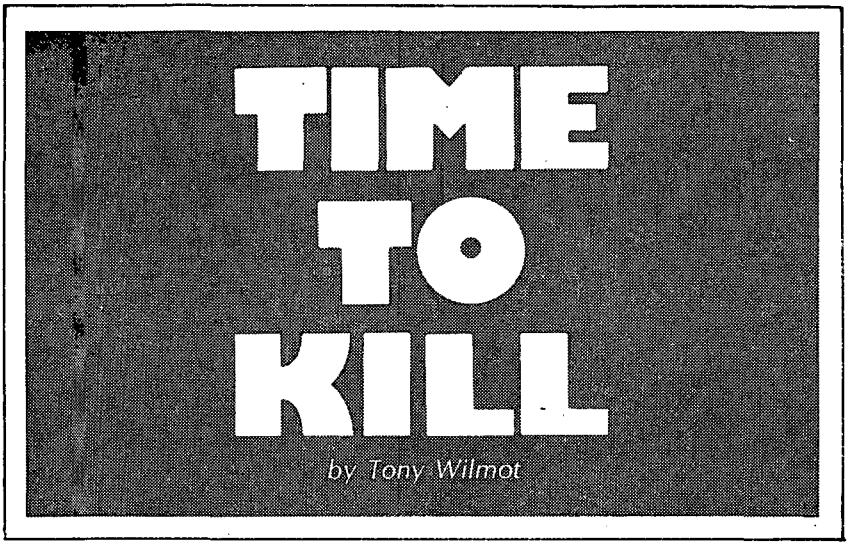

You've got to kill. In cold blood. Within 24 hours. The very thought of it makes the adrenalin burn through your veins like acid. There's no turning back; it's what you're paid to do, part of the job. "A political expediency" was the cliche Control selected from its library of euphemisms. Put that way it didn't seem so bad. But now the day of execution is almost here. And whatever word you – they – use, it's still murder . . .

The two men and the girl were sitting outside a cafe in a fashionable part of the city's Western Sector. The afternoon sun was hot and the wide pavements shimmered. At a nearby table, two hausfraus were spooning schlagober gateau into their fleshy mouths, oblivious to the traffic's roar and the tourists who herded past, eyes glazed with fatigue and excitement.

As a waiter set down their drinks, Mark Girland was saying, "I got out of uniform the moment the war in Vietnam ended. And from Army Intelligence I got into this racket." He grinned. "Out of the frying pan into the fire."

Steve Dunning had been listening to Girland with increasing irritation. "The cream of America's youth got caught up in Vietnam, pal. Like you, I was one of them. But we were lucky; a lot of guys never came back. It's over, so can it, will you."

Mark Girland smiled. "Hit a raw nerve did I? Sorry. Just making conversation." He feigned indifference but inwardly he was gloating;

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annoying Dunning was oddly satisfying.

Nadine Kurtz allowed her thoughts to wander. Men who reminisced about war-time experiences bored her. She was concerned only with the present. The past couldn't be altered, so dwelling on it was futile. But she knew Steve expected her to show some interest in Mark Girland, so she shrugged, saying, "Vietnam doesn't mean very much to me. I was just leaving school when it ended."

"You were lucky," Mark Girland went on. "It must rate as one of the costliest wars ever. Over a million people killed . . . cost the U.S. government 28 million dollars a day . . . and what did it prove?"

As Girland developed his theme, Steve studied Nadine's flawless features. A few freckles on her forehead marred an otherwise perfect skin; yet their presence added to her beauty. Eyes blue, flecked with grey and wide-set; mouth small but sensuous; shortish blond hair with a soft filmy quality in sunlight. Age? Late twenties, he guessed.

He was becoming involved. He knew it; she knew it. It was dangerous to form attachments in his business. It was one of the cardinal sins of Control. After his marriage had broken up, Steve thought emotional involvement couldn't happen again: He simply wouldn't let it. But he had.

Lighting a cigarette, Mark Girland said casually, "You both know why I've been sent here, of course."

Steve downed his whiskey; he was liking the man less by the second. "We've heard rumors."

Mark Girland followed a passing girl with his eyes, whistling softly. "The frauleins are everything they're reputed to be, eh?" He winked at Steve. "No need to turn the bedroom light off."

"Get to the point," Nadine said testily.

"Patience, my dear. There's no rush. We have all day." Mark Girland drew on his cigarette, exhaled luxuriously; a man who knew he held all the high cards. "Control is worried. They don't like weak links. They make them nervous. But, that's only reasonable, isn't it? They can't afford to take chances."

"And you," Steve said, "have been sent to find out which of us is a weak link. We *are* the prime suspects after all."

"I wouldn't put it as strongly as that."

"Oh? How would you put it?"

Nadine broke in gently. "What Mr. Girland means, Steve, is that he just wants to reassure himself we can be trusted. Isn't that so, Mr. Girland?"

"Why sure. There's no need to get paranoid, Steve. Like the lady says it's . . . "

"Who's getting paranoid!" Steve cut in. He cursed himself the moment he uttered the words. Idioti-

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cally, he felt himself coloring under Mark Girland's amused gaze. His stomach began to flutter; fear had always affected him that way. Who was the weak link if not himself? He'd broken the cardinal rule by getting emotionally involved with Nadine.

It was too late for wishing it hadn't happened. In any case, he was glad it had. It showed he was still human, not just a series of facts on a computer print-out.

"The Keitel job," Steve asked presently. "Is it off? Control has been very silent on that score lately."

"On the contrary," Mark Girland said, "it's very much on. But I shall be coming along for the ride, okay?"

"Do we have a choice?"

Mark Girland smiled, signalled to the waiter. "Let's have another drink. To the success of the Keitel job."

As she sipped her drink, Nadine scrutinized Mark Girland's rugged face. There was a hint of cruelty in the eyes. What was the flaw in his character – drink, women, money? Everyone had an Achilles' heel, even Control's top fieldman. And what had he meant by "weak link"? Her affair with Steve? Or something more?

"We have 13 hours left," Steve said, checking his watch. "Time to move."

Mark Girland settled the bill. "My place," he said, as they strolled toward the next intersection. "Tonight. Eight o'clock. Here's the address." He handed Steve a piece of paper, nodded, and walked off quickly, mingling with the crowds.

"He knows about us." Steve began to fidget with his cigarette lighter, resisting the urge to light up again. He'd managed to cut his smoking to two packs a day. Then, aware Nadine was disapproving of his nervousness, he slipped the lighter in his pocket. She knows a lot about me, he thought, but not everything. There were some things he'd never told anybody. Just as there were things she probably hadn't told him. Why, for one, had she chosen to work for Control instead of marrying and having kids? With her looks she could have had her pick. What motivated a woman like Nadine to risk her neck in counter-espionage?

"I said he *knows* about us."

"So?"

"So what do we do about him?"

"Nothing." She stubbed out her cigarette. "He doesn't have any proof. Control sent him to get it. So it's best if we don't stay together for a while."

"Nadine . . ." Steve reached for her hand.

"It's just as hard for me, Steve. Believe me, it's the best way."

"How long must we . . . ?" Steve tailed off miserably, trying not to visualize Nadine's hair splayed on the pillow beside him, trying to forget the way her fingers trickled over his body . . .

"I don't know. Not long. Just until

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I can work something out."

Steve gave her a long hard look, sensing what was going through her mind. "Liquidate him? We'd never get away with it."

"We might. If we think it through properly. You want us to be together, don't you?"

"Of course I do. But . . . "

"Then there's no alternative."

Ten hours to zero. You're beginning to wonder if you have the guts to kill in cold blood. You've killed before, but never like this; never someone you cared about . . .

Daylight had faded. Steve was in Klaus' bar (he and Nadine had had their first drink together there, so he had a nostalgic affection for the place). He dialed the number Nadine had given him, listening to it ring impotently at the other end.

He drummed his fingers on the window of the telephone booth. He wanted to hear her voice, talk to her, tell her about his premonition. The Keitel business stank. More so now that Mark Girland had been sent in as watchdog.

A voice answered "Census office" just as he was about to ring off. It was the cover for Control. "Miss Kurtz please," he said.

"I'm sorry. Miss Kurtz has left."

"I see. Has she been gone long?"

"About an hour. Is there a message?"

"No, thanks." Steve hung up. It was just 7:20 pm. Nadine had said she would be at that number until 8 pm. His hunch had been right, something had gone wrong with the Keitel job.

Steve took a taxi to Mark Girland's address, a small commercial hotel near the railway terminal, unpretentious but comfortable (he'd stayed there once with Nadine). Girland was registered as M.G. Girland, technical salesman, Ansco Plastics, Detroit. Well, it made a change from automobiles.

The room was number 18 on the third floor. He could hear muffled voices inside. The voices stopped when he pressed the bell.

Mark Girland beckoned him inside, and Steve stepped into the room, stopping abruptly when he saw Nadine on the couch, pale and smoking nervously. Was it his imagination or was she avoiding his eye? Questions scurried around his mind like frightened rats. Why hadn't she phoned him to let him know she was going straight to Girland's hotel?

Mark Girland said, "Nadine couldn't let you know, Steve. Her phone's being tapped." If they were tapping her phone they must also be tapping his.

"I think the KGB are on to us, Steve." Nervous tension made Nadine's voice husky. A familiar tightening came into Steve's throat as he glanced at her stockingclad legs; danger always heightened his

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desire for her.

"I managed to intercept a coded message from the Eastern Sector," Nadine said. "Keitel's going through the Wall earlier than we thought. And he'll be taken through in an armored van."

"That's not what we were told when we planned this operation," Steve said. "It's off then. Bullets can't penetrate armor plating."

Nadine was on her feet. "We can still do it."

"An armored van, Nadine? How, for God's sake?"

"That's *your* problem," Mark Girland said. "You're a trained marksman. Neither Nadine nor I can handle a precision rifle like you can. Control expects us to carry out the execution, and there's no margin for error. No reprieve for failure. I'm telling you, Dunning, our lives won't be worth the proverbial nickel if we bungle this."

Mark Girland had been assembling a rifle with a telescopic sight. He handed it to Steve, smiling when Steve gasped in admiration as he tried it for balance. He raised it to firing position, pleased at the way it fitted comfortably into his shoulder. He adjusted the sight until it bisected a point between Mark Girland's eyes. The firing pin clicked as he squeezed the trigger.

Mark Girland smiled thinly. "Made in Belgium. Holds twelve shells. Can be set to single or automatic. The sights are accurate to

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a thousandth of an inch, so nothing should go wrong. Keitel is a double agent. But the Russians have turned him. We want him dead before the KGB can get him into the Eastern Sector. Keitel knows too much about CIA operations in Europe. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Right. It's time we were moving. You, too, Nadine."

Steve hesitated, looking from Nadine to Mark Girland. Suddenly he didn't want her along when he did what he had to do. "Nadine stays here."

"No can do," Mark Girland said. "She has her orders, just like you and me."

"We can manage, Girland." Steve tried not to sound too anxious. "Lookout-man and trigger-man. We don't need a third operative along."

Nadine took Steve's arm. "He's right, Steve. I have my orders. I'm coming, too."

Steve nodded. Nadine was a professional; nothing he could say would change her mind.

So now it's closer, less than an hour away. Sure you're scared; it's only natural; you can even taste the fear. You've never had to kill in cold blood before . . . but there's always a first time for everything. And there's no room for sentiment. You were a fool to let yourself get involved. That makes it so much harder to do . . .

Nadine handled the Porsche coolly and expertly. A professional to her fingertips, Steve thought, as he looked at her profile illuminated by passing street lights. He'd often asked her how she had been recruited by Control; she had always evaded the question.

She lived a strange sort of existence. That was perhaps an inappropriate word, he reflected, but it certainly fit. Unmarried, devastatingly attractive, secretive; her entire being seemed to be an extension of Control. Her work obsessed her. Everything outside of work – eating, drinking, sleeping, making love – involved her intensely at the moment it was happening; then, when it was over, Control repossessed her, like some alter ego.

Usually a woman had to be wooed with candlelight dinner, soft music, romantic surroundings, but not Nadine. On the contrary, her approach had taken him by surprise.

Soon after his recruitment to Control's Berlin network, he had been assigned to the decoding office. He had worked with Nadine for several days before she even volunteered her name.

"It's Nadine," she had said, not raising her eyes from her work, "but don't call me anything but Miss Kurtz here."

"Does that mean," he'd said, "I can call you Nadine . . . elsewhere?"

"It might."

"And where is 'elsewhere'?"

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"I'll let you know."

That had been the entire conversation. She had expressed no further interest in him for a week. At the time, he was sweating over a new code the Russians were using. He had tried so many combinations he was seeing double. Suddenly, he was aware of warm breath on his neck, and a tantalizing perfume that reminded him vaguely of jasmine.

"First rule of deciphering," she said: "Don't let it break *you* before you break *it*."

He had found himself looking up into her eyes, experiencing the first of those soon to be familiar exciting sensations at the back of the throat; no other woman had had that effect on him in a long time.

"You asked about 'elsewhere', " she said. "My place. Home cooking."

She directed him to a suburb in an unfashionable district and told him to park outside a small apartment complex. Control owned the apartments, she explained, and she had done well to get one, as there was a waiting list. He might well be allocated one himself, eventually.

He thought at first that she was kidding, but she was absolutely serious. Her total commitment to Control was both admirable and a little sad. He hoped he might redress the balance.

Dinner was a simple affair of chicken salad, white wine, fruit and cream. Even before they had finished the meal, he was hooked. He helped clean up . . . then they sat in front of the imitation-logs gas fire, talking about their childhoods, previous jobs, previous relationships. Only when he touched on her reasons for joining Control did she show annoyance.

"What are *yours*?" she had countered. "A Reds under the bed complex, McCarthy style? Or something more idealistic?"

Then, as if in apology, she had smiled disarmingly and kissed him. They were lovers soon after.

"Hey, Steve, you awake?" Mark Girland's voice jolted Steve's thoughts back to the present; he had almost forgotten where they were going, what he had to do. "You haven't said a word since we left the hotel. You feel okay?"

"I'm not getting cold feet if that's what you mean." Steve tried to relax. Why let himself get riled by this man? Who was he anyway? A Control snooper. Well, he had taken care of snoopers before. He'd take care of this one, too, if need be.

"Something's bothering you, Mr. Dunning," Nadine said.

Steve reacted to her formal address, then remembered what they had agreed. "You must be psychic, Miss Kurtz," he said, with a touch of irony. "What bothers me is . . . if the KGB are on to us, aren't we sticking our necks out – going after Keitel, I mean? *We'll* be the sitting ducks."

"You're missing the point," Mark

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Girland said. "The Ruskies don't *know* Miss Kurtz has broken their code, so the element of surprise is still with *us*."

Steve fell quiet. Nadine seemed to be a stranger . . . just as if she had never shared his bed. A vague unease made him reach for a cigarette. As though sensing his disquiet, her thigh pressed against his; it was her way of saying "Don't worry."

"The coded message," Nadine said, "told us the change of rendezvous. Keitel is in a no longer used church, near a square which is deserted at night. The armored van will pick him up there. Tonight."

"And across the square from the church is a flat-topped warehouse," Mark Girland added. "That's where we'll be waiting."

Steve wet his lips. Why hadn't he been told all this earlier? He had the uncomfortable feeling that *he* was an outsider, that Girland and Nadine shared a secret from which *he* was excluded. They can afford to be calm, he thought. It's not their finger on the trigger. I'm the guy who has to do the killing.

For the rest of the journey, nobody spoke. Nadine turned into an alley at the rear of the warehouse and switched off the engine. The Porsche coasted to a halt. As they got out, their breath formed ghostly shapes on the night air. Steve slung the rifle-case over his shoulder.

A small steel door had been left unlocked. Steve shivered as he stepped inside. "What is this place – a gigantic refrigerator? A guy could freeze to death in here." He realized he was talking too much, a sure sign his nerves were on edge.

Mark Girland began to climb a flight of stairs.

Steve reached for Nadine's hand. She made as if to pull away, then squeezed his hand. The gesture raised his spirits.

The time has arrived . . . the moment of truth . . . and you know what you must do. But can you do it? Suddenly you're not sure anymore. Suddenly you want answers to questions that have no answers. And what about reasons? You're doing it because Control says you must . . . but is that a reason, a real reason? Enough of a reason?

The stairs led to a skylight. Once on the roof, Steve buttoned his coat; he couldn't risk letting the cold impair his aim.

A concrete parapet, about two feet high, surrounded the rooftop. At intervals were holes for drainage pipes.

Steve knelt beside one and slid the rifle barrel through. With the telescopic viewfinder, he could see every detail of the church opposite. The first shot would have to be fatal: there would be no opportunity for a second. Keitel's body would be exposed for three, four, maybe five

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seconds. Not much time. But enough. He released the safety catch. He was relaxed, confident.

Only the distant rumble of the city's night traffic broke the silence.

Nobody spoke.

Mark Girland fingered the .38 revolver in his pocket. Somehow he couldn't bring himself to trust Steve Dunning. A man who allowed himself to get emotionally involved, as Steve had, was vulnerable, was not to be relied upon. Steve was the weak link. Just *how* weak remained to be seen.

"There's the van." Nadine's voice cut the silence like a striking match.

Steve snaked his forefinger round the trigger, checked his breathing, focused the rifle's sight.

The church door opened. Three men emerged. One was short and stocky. Keitel. The man the West could not permit to tell what he knew. The man Steve had been assigned to kill.

Steve held his breath as the rifle-sight bisected Keitel's chest, then squeezed the trigger. He saw Keitel drop to the ground.

Then the rooftop exploded with gunshots from behind.

Mark Girland pitched forward; the back of his head had been blasted away.

Steve threw himself sideways, instinctively swinging the rifle into firing position. Nadine was standing eight feet away, gun in hand. From that range she couldn't miss. She didn't. The impact of the bullet lifted Steve six inches off the ground.

Now you're an assassin . . . now you know what it's like to kill someone in cold blood, what Control calls a "political expediency." Easy for them. They aren't involved. How could they even begin to imagine what it's like to shoot the only man you've ever wanted . . .

Numbness evaporated from his anesthetized brain and faces swam before his eyes like reflections in a pool. The voice came as though from the far end of a long dark tunnel.

"You're going to pull through, Steve. A rib deflected the bullet." Through the fog, Steve recognized the chief of Control. "Keitel can't harm the West; he's dead, thanks to you. Mark Girland, too, I'm sorry to say."

Steve heard himself ask after Nadine.

"The Kurtz woman? She was a double agent. When she thought she'd killed you, she turned the gun on herself. It was her only way out. The KGB had ordered her to kill you days ago — to prevent you getting to Keitel. But she delayed. And that was her fatal mistake. Just *why* she delayed is still something of a mystery."

It was no mystery to Steve. He knew why . . . →

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The Queen and King

By Isaac Asimov

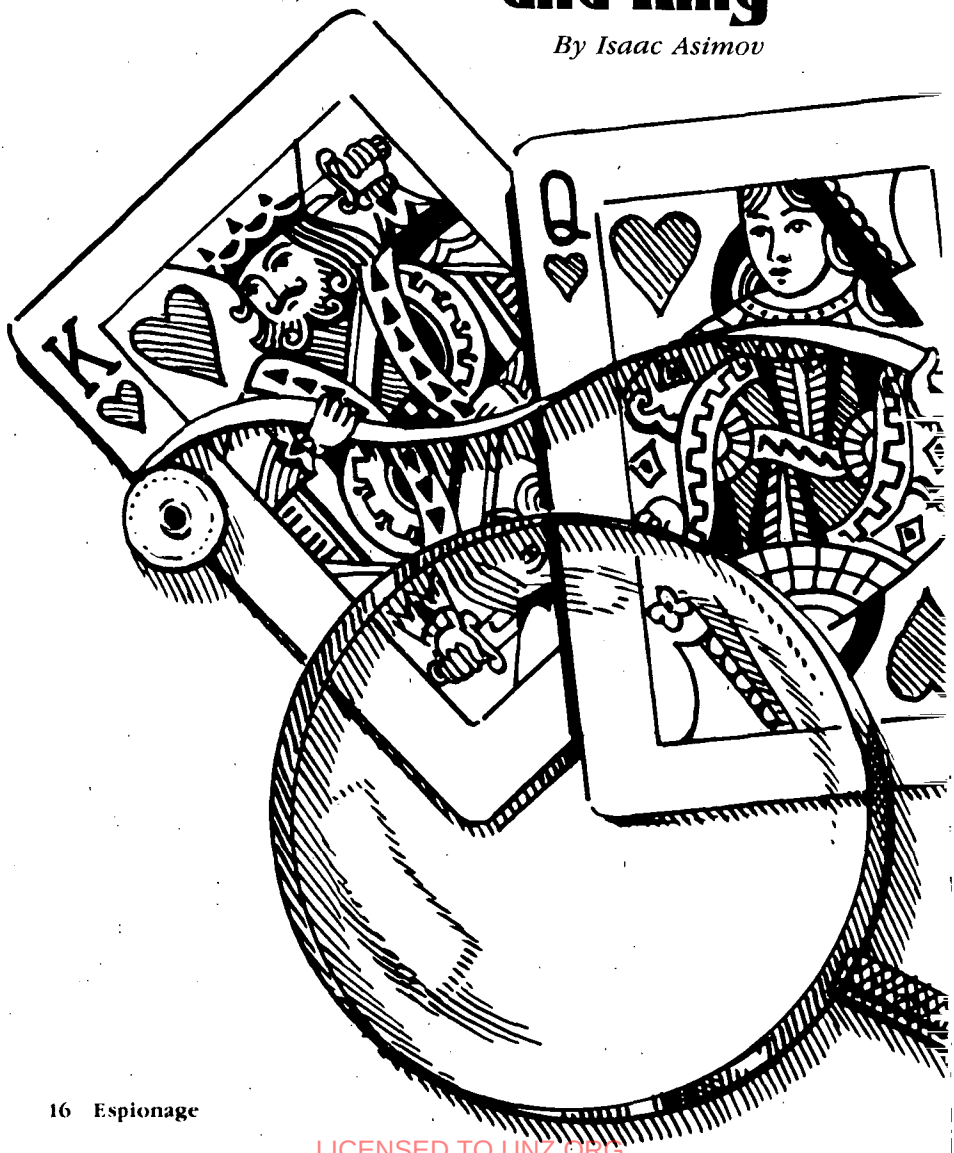

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Illustration by Robert Spike

Jennings was making the august library of the Union Club a hideous sounding-board for a detailed and incredibly boring description of a bridge game he had played the evening before. I knew him to be a pathetic slave of the game, but till now he had had the good taste to avoid inflicting his madness on the rest of us.

Not that Griswold minded. As long as he had his whiskey and soda in his vise-like grip, and could sleep, snoring softly in his winged armchair, he was content. Baranof had the gift of seeming to listen without actually involving his ear-drums. That left me as the sole sufferer.

"Actually," I said, at last, "I think bridge is a game that is of interest only to mental defectives."

Jennings grinned and said, "Then how is it you don't play it?" (That was just the sort of stupid remark I would expect of him. He knew what I meant.)

"As a matter of fact," he went on, "bridge calls for the exercise of memory, for the keen analysis of probabilities, and for a careful study of human psychology. Less cruel and bloody than poker, it is less rarefied and anemic than chess."

"Shouldn't you have arranged for the sound of soft violins as accompaniment?" I asked.

Baranof said, "If you two start shouting, Griswold will come to and claim he once solved a case as a result of his knowledge of bridge."

Griswold's eyes shot open as though there were strings attached and someone had pulled them. "It so happens," he said, and paused to sip delicately at his drink, "that I did."

Baranof groaned theatrically. "I knew it."

Griswold said, "It wasn't *exactly* bridge."

"But you'll tell us anyway, won't you," I said.

You suppose correctly [said Griswold]. This happened at a time when relations with a certain other power were at a low point. And

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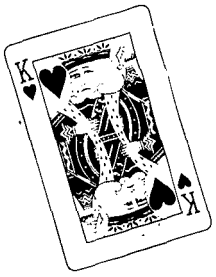

you needn't shout out your guesses at the identity of the power, for that is a matter of no consequence to my tale. Besides, I am sworn to confidentiality, so I'll simply refer to the other power as Eastland.

There was little we and they could agree on but among the little was the adulation of a certain pair of movie stars, who were married to each other and who were widely known as the King and Queen of the films. And don't bother telling me who they are, for their identity is of no consequence either. I'll call them Oscar and Emmy because neither of them had won either. Their fame did not arise from purely professional expertise.

They had been invited by the Eastlanders to visit some of their cities, and they were willing to do so. Emmy, in fact, was eager. But, of course, the Department insisted on being involved. Once they had gotten rid of me, you see, they had no one left who could be relied on to insist on some measure of sanity in their acts, and they were deliriously happy as a result — and usually insane, of course.

What they wanted was to have the two film stars deliver a strip of microfilm to a certain minor Eastlander official, one who could be relied on, it was felt, to get it to certain dissidents in the country. It would (the Department thought) exacerbate the internal stresses in Eastland, which would be a Good Thing.

Once the matter came to my attention, I pointed out quietly that it was mad to entrust something of this sort to an amateur when professionals would have found the matter difficult enough. Second, it was foolish to endanger hoped-for cultural exchange programs. Third, it was wrong to risk having American idols taken into custody as spies.

The answer was that it was just a matter of mischief-making and did not involve American security, so the risk was not great. Second, Eastland did the same with people they sent here. Third, the feeling was that Eastland would not risk world com-

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motion by making trouble for people who were idols of the world and not merely of the United States.

I won't say there wasn't something to the Department's self-justifications, but they were wrong, anyway. For one thing, the precious pair entrusted with the task were not only amateurs, they were film stars, which meant melodramatic amateurs. They went to a great deal of trouble to work out a particularly ridiculous scheme for transferring the information. It was Emmy's idea, actually. Of the two, she was the more hare-brained.

It was her notion to have a quantity of cookies made, with the microfilm buried in one of them. Naturally, the guilty cookie would be obscurely, but unmistakeably, marked for sure identification. The person for whom the microfilm was intended would be at a party hosted by our pair of America's sweethearts, and, amid lavish and distracting ceremonies, the correct cookie would be passed over.

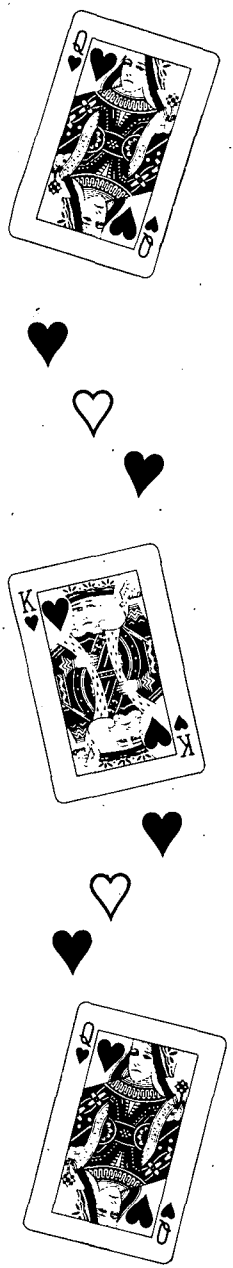
The number of ways in which this could go wrong was enormous and, of course, it *did* go wrong.

Emmy had a number of cookies wrapped, supervising the process with her very own sharp eyes and shrill voice, and carefully saw to it that the correct cookie (known to her alone) was wrapped in a different color. She placed it on the plate with other cookies in such a way that it was totally unobtrusive, but *she* knew where it was. She kept the plate out of casual reach of anyone else.

When the person she was waiting for arrived, and had identified himself with the appropriate inane remark, she whipped out the plate of cookies, and said, "I hope you like cookies, sir?"

"If you have made them yourself, madam," he said gallantly, in heavily-accented English, "I would prefer them to ambrosia." Sickening, but that was what he was supposed to say and it made it clear that he understood the significance of *the* cookie.

"I made these myself, indeed," said Emmy bright-



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ly. "Please help yourself."

He took several and, while he did so, she was supposed to seize upon *the* cookie and give it to him very casually. Its distinctive wrapping would keep him from mistaking it later, after he had put it, along with two or three innocent cookies, into his pocket.

I say that Emmy was *supposed* to seize upon *the* cookie, but she never did. *The* cookie simply wasn't there.

She scrabbled through the cookies on the plate with increasing agitation, looked on and under the table, began to pass from agitation to frenzy, and noticed that she was attracting amazed attention. She was trouper enough to give the waiting (and stunned) official something else, along with silvery laughter, and to maintain a brave front for the rest of the evening.

The cookie, however, was irretrievably gone and, when the evening was over, she had a raging headache (genuine) and then developed a serious attack of the flu (not so genuine) which forced her, and Oscar too, of course, to cut short their tour and return home. Eastland officials, whose politeness had now become freezingly formal, waved good-bye vigorously.

When our sweethearts of the screen returned, they reported angrily and defensively to the Department, which cleared its collective throat and felt foolish.

Emmy was naturally questioned rather closely, and it quickly became clear that the plate had *not* been under continuous surveillance. Anyone could have meddled with it. The hotel staff was in and out, cooks, waiters, and so on. Nor might it have been a matter of actual suspicion of wrong-doing. The microfilm had been put into something edible, after all, and the cookie might merely have been eaten and the microfilm casually swallowed, or possibly, spat out.

The Department, therefore, dismissed it as a

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regrettable accident.

But then, it appeared that several Eastland dissidents were questioned rather vigorously, and the minor official who was to receive the microfilm received a quick (and secret) trial and was sent to prison. Clearly, the cookie had not been casually eaten, but had been intercepted by the Eastlanders and the microfilm had been retrieved.

How was that possible? How had Eastland intelligence known about the cookie?

And then something else happened. We had an agent in Eastland who had infiltrated their intelligence apparatus and he managed to get us a message. It wasn't much of a message — one symbol and two letters. Nothing more. (Poor fellow. He died in harness not long after.) The message was:

"♥Q, K"

Old Harrison came to me with it at last. As they all did, he looked worried when he came in, looking this way and that. No one from the Department was supposed to come and consult me. I was off-limits. They all did, of course, once they were sufficiently desperate.

I said, "You weren't followed?"

He said, "Come, Griswold, I know you weren't treated well, but *I* had nothing to do with it."

"So now you want my help and if anything comes of it, you get all the credit."

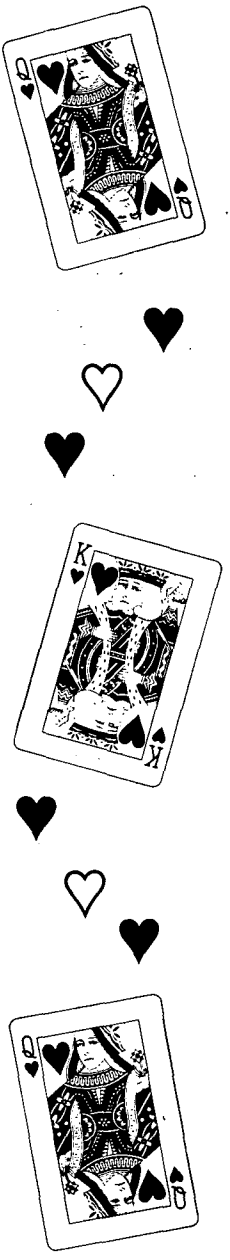
"Shall we put it this way, Griswold? Your country wants your help?"

I snorted politely. "Well, tell me what it's all about?"

He did. He told me the story and showed me the message. "But what does the message mean?" he asked plaintively.

I said, "I presume that what it says is 'The Queen and King of Hearts.' That's what it would mean in a bridge column."

"Yes, yes, of course. We saw that at once. But what does *that* mean?"



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"Since you told me the story of the movie couple and that stupid cookie of theirs, I suppose you think it must refer to them."

"We're sure of it. That's what Oscar and Emmy are always called in the film magazines. But what is the message referring to them *about*?" asked Harrison.

"I suppose that the logical first guess is that our agent might be trying to tell you that your precious pair tipped off the Eastlanders for some reason and that the whole business of the lost cookie is a charade designed to hide their treason."

"We can't believe that. Why on earth should they be willing to betray their country? They certainly weren't tortured into it, and they couldn't be bribed into it. They've got all the money and fame and adulation anyone could want."

"What about ideological conviction?"

Harrison looked astonished. "Come, Griswold, you can't be serious. Neither one could raise an ideological drop of sweat on Washington's hottest day. They're a pair of emptyheads."

"Are you sure? It's not so difficult to play dumb."

He shook his head, "Please. We've had occasion to investigate them before. We have plenty of evidence of their acting ability, and they just don't have it in them to play *that* dumb that well.

"What else can we find in that message? Our man is damned capable, and he wouldn't send this if it didn't mean something and if he didn't think we could understand it."

"Maybe you didn't get the whole message? Maybe this is a fragment and is incomprehensible for that reason."

"It's the whole message. We're sure."

So I looked at it again — ♥Q,K.

"Is that the way it came in? Exactly?"

"Yes, of course. Why?"

"Because the Q and K are in the wrong order. It should be K, Q. Cards are always listed in order of

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decreasing value: Ace, King, Queen, Jack, ten, and so on down to two."

"Emmy's the dominant one of the pair. Naturally, he'd refer to her first."

"Even though they're always referred to by their fans as 'the King and Queen of Hearts,' and *not* as the Queen and King of Hearts?"

"Even so."

I shook my head, stared at the message and said, "I presume that the sweethearts didn't travel alone, but had an entourage."

"Of course."

"And among them there must be a particularly trusted underling who's always with them; managing and running things for them."

"Yes, there's a man named Francis Biddeford who has been with the two of them since they got married. He serves as their agent and their general factotum."

"Good! Take my advice and turn him inside out. He'd know everything they were doing, and would have every opportunity to take the cookie and deliver it, out of ideological conviction, perhaps. This message says he's a traitor."

Harrison stared at it unbelievingly. "Where?"

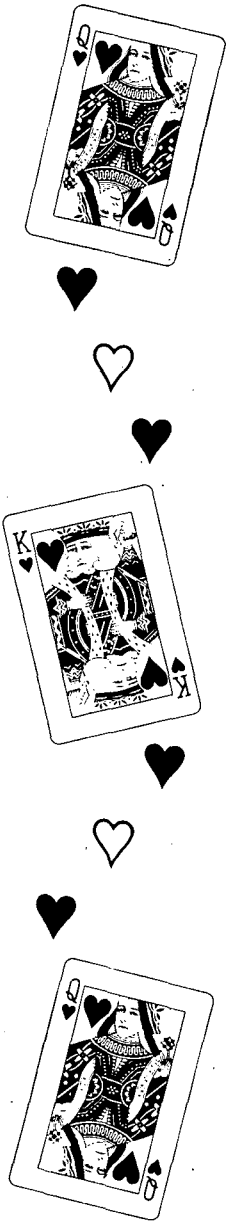
I explained, and he said, "I can't believe it."

But, out of desperation, he advanced the suggestion to the Department. Biddeford was faced with a relentless investigation and, under questioning, he broke down. As I had suspected, Harrison got the credit. And there you have it.

"Have what?" said Jennings, violently. "The message doesn't say anything but the King and Queen of Hearts."

♡ ♡ ♡

Just for fun, why not try to interpret this message yourself. Then, turn to page 160 and compare your interpretation with Griswold's.



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The PRESIDENT'S BRAIN IS MISSING

by Ron Goulart

The dying man sat up and yanked out a killgun. Jake Pace had been anticipating that and, after gently but swiftly shoving his lovely auburnhaired wife over onto the plaz cobblestones of the hospital courtyard, he drew his stungun and fired.

Zzzzzummmmm!

The figure on the stretcher stiffened, produced a series of internal clangings, dropped his deadly weapon and fell sideways over onto the stones.

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Illustration by Mike Kuchar

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The two ambulance attendants, who'd been trying to deliver the alleged accident victim to the exclusive Park Avenue Surgical Centre, both exclaimed, "The jig's up!" Abandoning their stretcher, they scooted for the cab of their eggshell-white skyvan.

Jake was about to go sprinting after them when his wife, on her feet again, grabbed him and dragged him to shelter behind a high decorative plaz hedge.

"Hildy, why the devil are you impeding my pursuit of those louts who..."

"The guy on the stretcher's an android, set to..."

Kabooom!

"Explode," finished Jake, as fragments of their would-be assassin went climbing up into the Manhattan twilight.

The fake ambulance was also in the air, heading away from them.

The debris from the mechanical man came raining down on the brixwalled surgical center courtyard. A plaz eye, bright blue, bonked Jake on the shoulder, a few blond curls fluttered down on Hildy.

"This must be an important case we're about to embark on," she observed.

"People don't hire Odd Jobs, Inc. for trivial cases," reminded her husband. He was a long lean man in his middle thirties, tanned and a bit weatherbeaten. In just three months from now, in June of 2005, their private detective agency would be ten years old. Their marriage was a year older. "We specialize, afterall, in the sort of investigations that few others, even crackajack government agencies, can handle."

Hildy smiled. "I don't recall saying, 'And now a word from our sponsor.' "

"Not vanity to state the obv..."

"Do you people intend, I mean really now, to frolic in our shrubbery for the remainder of the evening?" The coppercolored robot, who'd been examining their ID packets when the dubious skyambulance had come wailing down for a landing, was still standing on the steps of the glaz and sudometal hospital, metal hands on metal hips. "Afterall, you know, this is a hospital not a..."

"As I was mentioning," said Jake, escorting his lovely wife up to the threshold, "we have an appointment with the US Troubleshooter General, who teleported here from Washington, DC to..."

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"And what about the residue of that dreadful man who was pretending to be a potential patient?" inquired the hospital robot. "If you think I intend to sweep up that awful mess you've got..."

"We're now ten minutes late for our meeting," said Hildy, sweetly. "What say we discuss this matter *after* we..."

"Oh, surely, yes. I imagine you'd like that, wouldn't you? Leave me with a blownup assassin on my...Awk! Ooops!"

Jake had reached out to poke a spot in the mechanism's left armpit. That, though few knew it, was all it took to shut off this particular model. "Let's go in," he suggested to Hildy.

"You're even more impatient than usual tonight."

"Getting attacked by assassins tends to remind me of my mortality," he explained, urging her inside.

Less than forty-five minutes later, Jake was flying westward, alone, in one of their sleek Odd Jobs, Inc. skycars. He had a small makeup kit resting on his lap and was adding a beard to his chin.

The pixphone screen on the control dash buzzed and his auburn-haired wife's image appeared. "Jake, I...what's wrong with your face?"

"Not a damn thing. I'm simply applying a disguise so I can crash the Political Assassins Guild Annual Awards Banquet out in Greater Los Angeles tonight with ease and..."

"And that's supposed to be a beard?"

Jake affixed another lock of ginger whiskers. "Was that the purpose of your call? To heckle?"

"Nope, I wanted you to know I've located Eroica Tone," answered Hildy with what might or might not have been contriteness. "She's down in Florida, which is where I'm heading."

"Okay. Be careful and check with me later tonight."

"You be careful, too, Jake. With that godawful beard you're going to need a lot of...well, never mind. Bye. I love you."

"Same here." After the small oval screen went dead, he picked up a mirror to examine his face. "Hell, that's one of the most believable beavers I've ever encountered."

Jake flipped a toggle on the dash, deciding to play again highlights from his vidtape of their recent interview back in Manhattan with United States Troubleshooter General Russell Toilet.

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" ...ahead and laugh," the stocky pinkish man was saying.

"Russ," Hildy told him, "we've known you for several years, ever since you were with the Federal Obfuscation Office. We no longer feel moved to mirth over your name. Never did, for that matter."

Well, when one has a funny name...a dirty name...one expects continual... "

"Let's," suggested Jake, "talk about our fee."

"And the nicknames I've had hurled at me over the years: Doodoo, Potty, Crapper..."

"The fee?"

"We can't do better than $250,000. We lost quite a bit on those hayfever missiles aimed at..."

"$500,000," countered Jake.

"C'mon, Jake, that's an outrageous price for just..."

"How many goverment agents have you lost already on this particular problem, Russ?"

"Well...a few."

Hildy said, "Twenty-six is an odd definition of a few."

"It's only twenty-five. FBI Agent Truett turns out to have died of natural causes."

"How can somebody fall off the torch of the Statue of Liberty and die of natural causes?"

"He had vertigo, which the FBI should've..."

"$500,000," mentioned Jake, again. "In front."

"You know, I've still got top agents like Rowland Pond working on this. Could be he'll crack it and we won't need you folks at..."

"The United States government," reminded Hildy, "never calls in a private inquiry agency like ours unless they're desperate, Russ."

"Okay, how about half now and the rest in tax rebates over the next five..."

"All. Now."

"I don't think you're being at all patriotic, Jake."

Hildy said, "For a job like this we'd charge a *foreign* government at least $750,000. And don't forget that we've already had an attempt made on our lives."

"By the way, shouldn't you save the scraps of that andy and go over them for clues to..."

"Nope," said Jake, "it's a standard Taiwan-2 android."

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"How do you know that?"

"Watched the pieces come tumbling down. Do we get our fee?"

Toilet got pinker. "All right, but..."

Jake, slouched slightly in the driveseat of the skycar, fastforwarded his tape to the spot where TG Toilet was giving the details of the case.

"...as you may have heard, even though Obfuscation tried mightily to suppress all mention, President Singleton's been suffering from a rare neurological disease known as Ellison's Syndrome. The victims of this dread malady have their brains go completely and permanently blank within a matter of months. Fortunately, Dr. Tinkerman here at the famed Park Avenue Surgical Centre has just recently perfected a procedure whereby the entire contents of a human brain can be transferred electronically, and quite painlessly, to a silicon chip no bigger than, to use the good doctor's quaint expression, a gnat's pecker. The process is costly, of course. The surgeons' and electricians' bills for the president's recent operation run to $756,000,000, and that doesn't include his daily room rate, or the..."

"For one nitwit operation, you guys lay out $756,000,000," cut in Jake, "and then you bitch about giving us a paltry $500,000."

"Jake, let Russ continue."

"Sometimes I wonder, Hildy, how you came to tie up with a man who's so mercenary."

"He's awfully cute, Russ. Continue."

"Very well. Dr. Tinkerman and his able crew of humans, androids and robots performed the complex operation successfully two days ago. Unfortunately, however, once the information is transferred the original human brain is left completely blank," continued Toilet. "Therefore, all of President Singleton's knowledge, all the important governmental secrets he was privy to, are now contained only in that chip. After a few days had passed and he was judged fully recovered from the original operation, then the chip was to have been planted in his skull. However..."

"Somebody swiped the brain chip," said Jake.

"Exactly," admitted the Troubleshooter General, forlornly. "The chip was taken from this very room in which we stand. The alarm system was deftly made inoperative, the formidable duo of robot guards rendered defunct and the storage cabinet opened with ease.

"It's most important we find the brain before this Thursday."

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"Why Thursday?" asked Hildy.

"Well, I can't say. Just trust me that..."

"Panazuela," said Jake.

Toilet jumped back. "How'd you know about..."

"Odd Jobs, Inc. is in the business of knowing things," he replied, grinning. "Two weeks ago, the Office of Clandestine Activities, working on secret orders from President Singleton himself, planted six thousand-some canisters in the major cities of that troubled Central American country. Those canisters are tied in with a computer located in Arlington, Virginia, and unless somebody gives it a countermanding order by noon Thursday, every darned one of them will explode."

Hildy snapped her shapely fingers. "And Singleton's the only one who knows the password that'll shut off the canisters."

Toilet sighed. "It took six long weeks to plant the gas and there's simply no way we can retrieve them in two days," he admitted. "We have to find the president's brain because..."

"Because Congress got wind of this and they're starting to make an enormous fuss. If the Lugubrium Gas is actually used down there you'll all be in considerable trouble," said Jake, his grin widening.

"They're very touchy about this sort of thing on the Hill," said the TG. "And it's not as if the Lugubrium is fatal. The stuff is actually quite humane. What the president and the OCA had in mind was to make those rebels who control Panazuela suddenly lugubrious...sad, depressed, tearful, given to uncontrolled kvetching. While they were thus occupied, a crack army of more moderate exiles would be landed in the key cities to take over."

"But now that Congress is catching on," said Hildy, "you don't dare pull that. Shame on you anyway, Russ."

"This whole mess wasn't my idea, Hildy. I only..."

"You mentioned when you pixed us up at our place in Connecticut," cut in Jake, "that your various investigators found only two clues and couldn't make anything out of either."

Nodding, Toilet pointed to the plaz flooring in front of the wall panel that concealed the cabinet where President Singleton's new brain had been reposing. "That odd little scratch on the floor is one," he said, "and this single thread the other." He produced a plyolope containing a thin, inch long twist of purplish neowool.

Jake knelt, rubbing his fingertips over the tiny scratch.

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"Somebody was tapdancing here," he concluded.

"Tapdancing? Really, Jake, I'm not in the mood for..."

"Bojangles Jazzinsky," said Hildy.

Jake stood. "Yep. That's one of his quirks. When he's elated he does a small dance," he said. "And swiping the president's brain is the sort of accomplishment that'd make him jolly."

"Why didn't the FBI, the CIA, the OCA or the Manhattan Murder-Theft Squad know that?"

Shrugging one shoulder, Jake answered, "For one thing, they don't have the resources Odd Jobs, Inc. does."

Hildy took the little plaz envelope from the Troubleshooter General. "Might Bojangles' client be Eroica Tone, Jake?"

"The lady who heads the Wargas Advisory Board and is dedicated to championing the wider use of chemical and biological weapons?"

"That Eroica Tone, yes." Hildy lifted the purple thread from the envelope. "She likes to wear off-the-rack-warmup suits."

"Yeah, usually purplish ones," said Jake thoughtfully. "Sure, and Bojangles goes for neolon jackets with silver studs all over them. When she hired him, a thread from her suit must have been caught on a stud. Later it dropped off here."

"She's the sort of woman who's always hugging people," added Hildy.

"Okay," said Jake. "Bojangles, who's one of the best assassins and catburglars in the country, is up for an award at the Political Assassins Guild bash out in Greater Los Angeles tonight. I'll go out there and chat with him."

Hildy said, "And I'll find Eroica Tone."

Toilet looked from Jake to his wife. "This sounds very impressive. You're not just conning me are you?"

Jake gave him a bleak grin. "My only real flaw, Russell, is a tendency to be completely honest with our clients. I never lie to them," he said. "Now get us a certified check for the $500,000 so we can get started on this mess."

The lobby of the New Allah Hotel was vast, made entirely of seethru glaz. The hotel sat out on pilings over the Pacific Ocean in the Malibu Sector of GLA. Jake, decked out in believable whiskers and a three-piece tuxsuit, came striding from the groundlevel skycar lot at a few minutes past eight Pacific Con-

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servative Time. There were several conventions and banquets going on at the luxury hotel tonight and besides assassins, Jake found himself rubbing shoulders with members of the Space Colony Realtors of America, the Transexual Mothers of the West, the Quack Doctors Association and the Senior Citizens Motorcycle Gangs of the USA.

It was while dodging two ninety year old cycle hoods in leather studsuits that Jake brushed against a slender blonde young woman who was sobbing into a plyochief. "Something?" he inquired.

The girl, who wore a two-piece pinstripe clingsuit, was quite pretty. "Oh, no...nobody can help me," she said sniffing mournfully. "Unless that person was a pianist."

Jake grinned. "I happen to play a little piano," he told the unhappy blonde. Actually he was, although his wife now and then suggested he was a shade too vain about it, an excellent piano player. Classical, pop, jazz, cocktail.

The girl made an inhaling, burbling sound. "Oh! That's marvelous." Then she slumped further. "But...heck, I don't just need a piano player, I need a progressive jazz piano player, one who's expert at recreating the style of the middle of the last century." After carefully wadding up the hankie she'd been crying into, she nodded across the wide crowded lobby. "See that cocktail lounge yonder, sir."

"Club Bebop. That one?"

"Yes. I'm the manager of the place and the bebopper I hired ran off to Yucatan with his wife's best friend only moments ago and if I don't find a substitute at once I'll be up the creek and out on my ear." Suddenly, putting her head against Jake's chest she resumed her sad sobbing.

"Hey, no need for that," Jake said. "I can take the time to do at least one set for you, miss." The presentation of the prestigious Brutus Award of Assassin of the Year wouldn't take place for at least an hour or more. Since Bojangles Jazzinsky was one of the nominees, he'd be certain to stick around up in the Nixon Ballroom at least until then.

"Can you actually play that style of music?"

"Sure, I'll do my bop medley. Bud Powell, Thelonius Monk and Red Garland. Maybe throw in a little Horace Silver.

"Perfect." She lifted her tearstained face from his chest and gave him a moist grateful kiss on the cheek. "That's the very sort of

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oldfashioned junk our dippy patrons dote on." Taking hold of his arm, she began escorting him across the lobby. "By the way, what's your name?"

"I'm Strangler Wisebacker."

"An assassin, are you?"

"Quack doctor."

"Oh, I thought because of the name."

"It's my real first name. My late father had a rather eccentric sense of humor."

"My name is Susie Miller. I've always thought it sort of bland, but I guess it's a heck of a lot better than Strangler Wisebacker." She tugged him across the threshold of the cocktail lounge, nodding at the doorman, a chunky fellow in beret, darkglasses and zootsuit. "I found someone, Diz."

"That's a gas."

Of the twenty or so patrons in the dimlit oval room, over half were ancient members of motorcycle gangs. They hooted and made shaky attempts at obscene gestures as Jake mounted the piano stool.

The upright piano rested on a rectangle of seethru glaz and the Pacific was visible underfoot. Jake adjusted the stool, flexed his fingers, collected his thoughts and commenced playing.

He was only a few notes into *Un Poco Loco* when a sweetsmelling pinkish gas began to whisper up from the keyboard at him. As it engulfed him, Jake muttered, "Duped again. What'll Hildy say when..." His face played a harsh chord when he fell into the piano.

"Let me through, I can help," cried a man in the audience. "I'm a quack."

The lanky blond young man in the two-piece clownsuit blushed when Hildy emerged, long bare legs foremost, from the glistening just-landed skycar. "Darn," he murmured, smoothing his polka dot pants.

Hildy, who wore a shortskirted spunglas suitdress and had silky platinum hair now, inhaled the warm Florida night air. "You must be Mr. Ives," she said smiling.

Distant calliope music drifted across the darkness beyond the landing area.

"Ulp," said Preston Ives, Jr.

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"Whatever is bothering you?" Reaching out, she patted his perspiring cheek.

"Well, Mrs. Silverhill...I'm...gee...sort of embarrassed. We salesmen here at the Circus Factory have to wear these clownsuits...but...well, with somebody like you...I feel sort of silly."

"You look absolutely terrific," Hildy assured him. "And call me Bunch."

"Bunch?"

"Short for Honeybunch. That's my dear husband's nickname for me. He's Arnold Silverhill, who owns the baseball teams in America."

"I've heard of him," responded Ives. "So have my bosses, which is why they opened up the salesrooms at this ungodly hour, ma'am. Ordinarily, we only sell our robot clowns, lions, elephants, trapeze artists and so on, by day."

"I really appreciate the gesture." She patted his cheek again.

"Um...did I get the message right?" asked Ives. "You want to buy a whole circus?"

"Yes, but it isn't for *me*." She laughed. "It's for dear Arnold...He's a fanatic circus buff and I want to give him one for his birthday. He'll be forty next week. That's an important milestone in any man's life."

"So I hear. I'm only twenty-six at the moment."

"You look much more mature."

"Um...when you say a whole and entire circus, ma'am..."

"Call me Bunch."

"When you mention that you want to purchase a whole circus, Bunch...um...is that a three ring circus or a one ring?"

"Three of course, Pres. Is that what they call you...Pres?"

"Actually, people call me Poison. That's sort of because my last name is ivy."

"You'll be Pres to me." Hildy linked her arm with his. "Before you show me the mechanical elephants and all...how many elephants will I need, by the way?"

"Six?"

Hildy's pretty nose wrinkled as she thought. "That really doesn't sound like enough," she said. "But before we get down to business, Pres, I wonder if you could tell me where my dear old friend Eroica Tone is staying."

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"Over in Guest Pavillion #2, Mrs....um...Bunch." He pointed into the darkness at a faroff chain of floating blue spots of light. "She's a real circus enthusiast, too, and comes down here two or three times a year to watch our techs test the latest mechanical clowns and animals. You're friends, huh?"

"Frankly, my husband's interest in circuses started after he heard Eroica gushing about your Circus Factory."

"Well, we do make just about the best mechanical circus equipment in the world."

"Which is why I'm here." Smiling, she patted his cheek and then tweeked his nose.

"Gosh... " Ives straightened up, arms dropping to his side. His eyes came fluttering shut.

Hildy dropped the tiny knockout mist capsule she'd broken beneath his nostrils into her shoulder bag and caught the clownsuited salesman before he fell over.

After a careful glance around, she dragged him behind a stand of palmetto trees. Then she went walking briskly for the pavillion that housed her quarry.

"Oh, that," said the middlesized, middleaged man in the two-piece white cazsuit. "I've got that right here." He lifted his wallet from his hip pocket, opened it and eased out his skydriver's license. "Notice the wart on the cheek in the ID photo? "That's actually the president's brain. Stuck it on with Elmer's Glue. That stuff really does a great job of..."

"Why," Jake interrupted to ask, "did you drag me down here to Panazuela, Pond?"

Rowland Pond blinked, scanned the sunfilled storeroom and said, "What makes you think you're in Panazuela, Jake?"

Jake, hands tied behind him, was sitting in a lame wicker chair next to a stack of neowood crates. "Listen," he suggested, nodding at an open window.

"Guitar music," recognized the renegade US government agent. "Layabouts singing in Spanish. Yes, those are good clues sure enough."

"Parrots, too, and cockatoos," added Jake, "jabbering in the palm trees I can see across the way."

"You're not such a bad detective at that."

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"Besides which," said Jake, "all these cases of Holy Cola say 'Bottled in Panazuela under a license of the Holy Cola Company of Iola, Wisconsin.' "

"I've never stored a prisoner here before," Pond said. "I should've realized there were so many telltale signs."

"Why'd you take me prisoner and not just kill me?"

"Don't tell me you're complaining about my not bumping you off, Jake?"

"You and your gang have killed twenty-six investigators already."

"Twenty-five." Pond seated himself in a wing chair facing Jake. "You we decided to keep as a hostage, since, and I don't mean this merely as cheap flattery, you're a heck of a lot betterknown than any government agent, even me, and..."

"You in this with Eroica Tone?"

Pond nodded. "You hear about some agents who sell out for money and some who sell out for sex," he said, smiling contentedly. "I'm getting both. $230,000 in cash and Eroica. Now, I know she's sort of slim and she's nearly forty and some people say she's about three degrees nastier than a pit viper and it's possible she'll throw me out on my toke when she tires of..."

"What exactly is the purpose of all this?" Jake had been, unobtrusively, testing the neorope that bound his wrists. He was certain he could, in time, work free. "You want the gas to go off, is that it?"

"Yes, right. It'll be a terrific demonstration of the effectiveness of wargas in general. It took Eroica months to cajole President Singleton and the OCA into trying this and we aren't going to let Congress futz it up now. The publicity value of devastating a radical country with something like Lugubrium is fantastic and..."

"What about the president's brain?"

Pond patted his wallet and slipped it back into his hip pocket. "Oh, once the gas canisters go off, we'll send it back," he said. "Either by United Parcel or Fed Express; wouldn't trust the Post Office. Eroica wanted to send it 4th Class Rate, but I feel that's snide and, after all, it is the president of the United States we're..."

"Excuse it, senor."

Pond, frowning, turned toward the uniformed man who'd opened the door and come quietly into the storeroom. "What's wrong now, Raoul?"

"Is the reporter."

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"What the hell would a reporter be doing here?"

The lieutenant of the Opposition Army consulted the business card held out in his left hand. "She is with the *Tiny Tots Magazine* of Chicago, Illinois," he explained. Her name is Vera Dalyrimple and..."

"I'm here to do a piece on how Holy Cola is brewed and bottled." Hildy pushed the lieutenant aside, gently, and came in. She had shortcut grey hair, wore a two-piece bizsuit and carried a large sudostraw purse over her left shoulder. "Our four and a half million readers are eager to know how their favorite soft drink is made. For instance, what function does that lanky gentleman tied to the lopsided chair serve in the whole process."

"Oh, him," said Pond. "He's one of our employees who just went berserk. They do that a lot here in Panazuela. Running amok they call it. You just tie them up until the mood passes."

"Fascinating." She moved closer to her husband.

"Miss Dalyrimple, if you want the full Holy Cola story, you ought to visit our main plant in Iola, Wisconsin," Pond told her. "Because that's where..."

"I'd better tell you why I came *here* instead." Smiling sweetly, Hildy reached into her purse. "This will explain everything."

Zzzzzzummmmmm!

Zzzzzzummmmmm!

She fired the stungun she'd produced, twice.

The lieutenant stiffened and toppled over first, followed an instant later by Pond.

Putting the gun away, Hildy took a small knife from her purse. "Honestly, Jake," she said, while slicing the ropes. "Letting them con you into playing the piano."

"You got to Eroica Tone?"

"Sure. And after I used some truth mist on her, she informed me all about her plans and about you.

Jake stood up as soon as the final rope fell free. "Singleton's brain is in Pond's wallet," he said, rubbing at his wrists.

Kneeling, Hildy abstracted the wallet from the hip pocket of the stunned agent. "Once this gets back into the president's head, he's just going to come up with more crackpot plans and mischief."

"Even so," said Jake, "we have to return it." Taking the wallet from her, he slid it into his breast pocket. "Thanks for rescuing me." +

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THE PURIST

by Edward Wellen

Clyde Morlock — that was the name he used in England — found the Admiralty plans in Sir George Fliflet's desk drawer. These Englanders! So punctilious in small matters, so careless in momentous ones.

Morlock drew the plans from the accordion-pleated paper wallet he had found them in and spread them on the desk top. Yes, these were the specifications for the coaling stations Her Britannic Majesty's fleet would need if — say rather when; if not this decade, then the next — war came and the Kaiser's fleet blocked the Suez Canal. To make the voyage to India the long way around, ports to refuel and reprovision at and to put into for repairs and refitting, were vital. Alliances were always chancy, treaties always liable to breaching — especially in time of war, when needed most. Great Britain required bases under its total control, bases a potential foe would be unaware of, bases from which the British fleet could sally forth to strike unexpected blows and withdraw to for shelter and resupply. And these plans laid it all out. Which Pacific atolls and Indian Ocean isles were to be secretly made ready, which harbors blasted and dredged for the draughts of the British fleet's mightiest warships, what supplies built up where.

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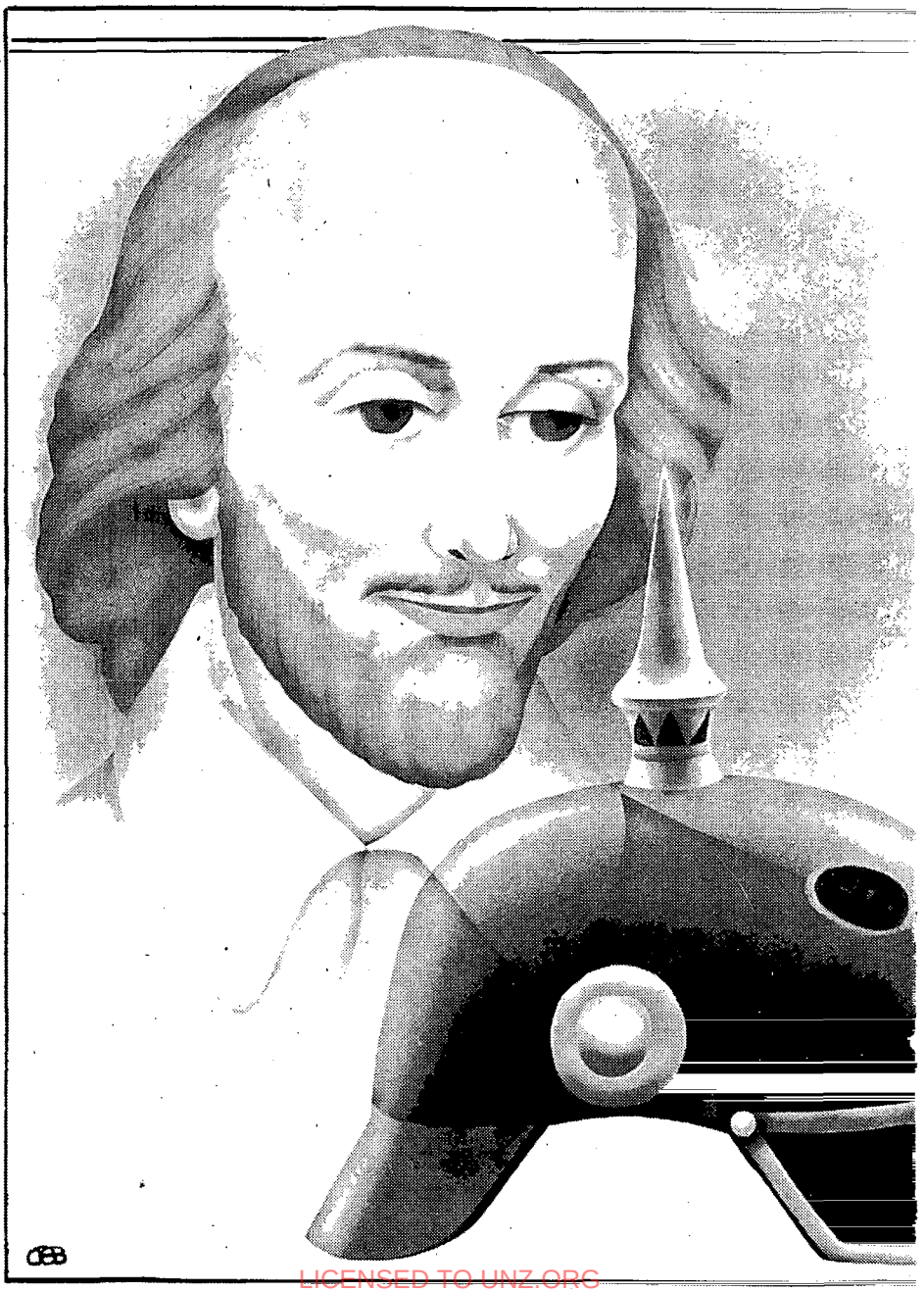

Illustration by Bruce Baker

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With these plans in hand, the Kaiser's agents could sabotage the installations, snap the links in the chain of empire the late Disraeli had been forging for his sovereign.

Morlock's own sovereign had dreams of empire, of an empire to put the British *lion* in the shade. How grateful the Kaiser would be to the man who made that possible! Morlock almost stiffened to attention, visualizing the Kaiser himself pinning a coveted Iron Cross on his chest, a chest that swelled now in anticipatory pride.

But this was no time to stand gloating.

Shakespeare said it, as Shakespeare had said everything else:

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood,
Leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

Capital advice.

Morlock found a supply of blank writing paper in the same drawer, helped himself to a dozen sheets, folded them in three, and stuffed them into the cardboard wallet to keep the theft from becoming immediately obvious. He replaced the wallet in the drawer, in the exact position he had found it, and carefully closed the drawer.

He took up the plans from the desktop and suddenly realized why Shakespeare had surfaced in his mind. Morlock's task was to get the plans to a fellow secret agent who, in turn, would spirit the plans out of England. This spy courier was presently staying at Stratford, Shakespeare's village.

Morlock would not even risk returning to his room. He would pocket the plans and slip out of the house straightaway. The Clyde Morlock identity could not stand up under sustained scrutiny by Scotland Yard detectives, to say nothing of Naval Intelligence wallahs. Clyde Morlock would have to vanish after this night's work. Sink without a trace.

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Full fathom five, as Shakespeare said.

Resurface elsewhere, of course. Perhaps — and he grimaced — facing the world from behind mutton chops and a walrus mustache. In any event, he would assume another identity, travel in other circles, in another part of the country. Shakespeare had a telling phrase for that, too. ***What's in a name?*** That which is sub rosa is only furthered by the taking on of other names. Still, the man who went by the name of Clyde Morlock felt a sad smile tug at his mouth. He knew a pang at having to jettison Clyde Morlock. The part had fitted him snugly.

He had enjoyed playing an Australian sheep rancher grown wealthy on wool and mutton and looking for nothing better than to retire to the English countryside and become an English country gentleman. He had taken great pleasure in weekending as guest of the gentry, shooting pheasant and dining elegantly. His next assignment might not provide the same high level of —

The library door swung suddenly open, freezing Morlock in the act of stowing the plans in an inner pocket of his dinner jacket.

"So! Caught you redhanded, you rotter! Betray my hospitality, would you?" Sir George's voice, like the roar of a lion.

Morlock took a half step sideways to free himself for action. The corridor being dark, Sir George had only brought more darkness with him, so Morlock was as yet unsure what that action would be.

Sir George had the advantage. "Stand still." Despite his anger, Sir George chuckled. "You make a splendid target against the french windows in the moonlight."

Morlock let his shoulders sag and spoke in a defeated tone. "As you say, Sir George."

But as Sir George did not follow his own advice and stand still, and instead made the mistake of striding confidently nearer and showing himself in the band of moonlight, Morlock moved.

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Morlock swept up the heavy glass inkwell from the desk and hurled it, all in one continuous movement. The inkwell struck Sir George full on the brow and felled him, but not before his pistol discharged.

The force of the bullet spun Morlock about. He did not fall, but felt immediately dizzy. That would be shock. The bullet had passed through Morlock's right arm and lodged in his chest. He knew he was leaking a lot of blood: most likely dying. But he had his escape to make good, the plans to transmit, his mission to accomplish.

First his escape. The shot would fetch the servants. Morlock stepped quickly to the heavy door, closed it, and propped a chair under the doorknob, finding as he did so, that the bullet had rendered his right arm nerveless. And when Sir George stirred and started struggling to his feet, Morlock had to use his left hand to pick up the glass inkwell to complete the job. The left hand, too, picked up the pistol and jammed it in his pocket. As the first timid knock sounded on the door, Morlock slipped out through the french window and into the night.

Professer Alexander Chechele caught himself nodding over the proof sheets of the latest revision of his magnum opus *Good Usage* and rubbed his eyes and massaged his neck. Wearying business, trying to correct the errors, preserve minimum standards, hold back the barbarians.

He frowned. Something had brought him out of the momentary doze. A noise? He listened. A stir out there in the night. He creaked to his feet and pulled the drapes of his french windows slightly apart. He peered vaguely out across the moonlit lawns and neatly clipped hedges and their equally neat shadows. A to-do at the Fliflet household three lawns away, all the lights lit and figures moving about.

None of his affair. He shrugged and pulled the drapes to. But as he made his way back toward his desk, a tapping on the glass halted him. He turned

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back around and parted the drapes again. A figure crouched low to keep from showing above the balustrade gestured for admittance.

Professor Chechele looked beyond the Fliflets' and hesitated. The figure gave a grunt of impatience, and with what proved to be a pistol shattered a pane. The pistol disappeared momentarily, a left hand reached in and awkwardly unlatched the french window, and the pistol reappeared in the left hand of the man who burst in.

"Quick, the drapes!"

"You mean *quickly*," Professor Chechele said automatically, but closed the drapes.

With a wave of the gun, the man gestured him backward, then seated himself in the professor's chair. He looked all done in, if not quite done for. His right sleeve was dark with blood and a patch of the same darkness stained the right side of his dinner jacket. The man was barely holding himself together. "I can go no further."

"You can go no *farther*," Professor Chechele said.

The man stared at him.

"Let me spare you the effort of speaking, at least until you find it necessary to correct me," Professor Chechele went on. "It would seem that you had a set-to with Sir George — I recognize the chasing on the pistol — and that you are now on the run. How is Sir George? You may indicate his condition with a nod or a shake of the head."

The man hesitated, then shook his head.

Sadly, Professor Chechele shook his own head. "He was more neighbor than friend, but I shall miss him. I suppose it is too much to expect that you are prepared to surrender to the authorities?"

The man smiled grimly. "I am a desperate man." Still holding the pistol, he freed thumb and little finger to draw folded sheets of paper from his inner pocket.

Professor Chechele weighed the odds and decided that frailty and slowness made successfully jump-

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ing the man and wresting the pistol from him, or successfully dashing from the room and raising the alarm highly unlikely.

The man laid the papers on the desk. The gun pointed again at the professor. "These plans will make Vikky's throne very shaky."

A flush came to the professor's cheeks, a flash to his eyes. Ignoring the pistol, he stood as erect as when singing "God Save the Queen" and shook a finger. "In this house, sir, you will refer to Her Majesty as Queen Victoria."

Half-rising, the spy bowed stiffly, in not-entirely-mock respect. "I stand corrected. I am an honorable enemy." He sat back down, with a grimace. "The fact remains, your beloved monarch's domains will shrink. I tell you this so you will realize I am a desperate man, with nothing to lose. I haven't time for torturous explanations — "

"*Tortuous,* not torturous. A rambling discourse is tortuous. Though," the professor added to be fair, "to a listener it may be torturous."

"Enough talk," the man barked. "I can aim and fire this pistol with my left hand, but my right hand, my writing hand, will not hold the pen. Therefore, you will do me the service of addressing an envelope." He glanced at the professor's neatly arranged stationery. "I find your envelopes ideal for my purpose. They already bear your return address. You have merely to write a name and address at my direction." He got up with some effort. "Take the seat, please, and write."

"And if I refuse?"

The spy raised the pistol and the professor looked down its bore.

"I see."

The spy moved out of his way, and out of his reach, and the professor took the seat.

He took an envelope, dipped his pen in the inkwell, and waited.

The spy drew a ragged breath. "Address the

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envelope to A. Tobit, Esq., presently staying at the White Swan, Stratford on Avon."

Professor Chechele opened his mouth to correct his visitor, then clamped it shut. He shot a glance toward his correspondence file, then looked down to hood the gleam in his eye. He gave his pen hand a preliminary, limbering-up twirl, then addressed the envelope in a flowing hand.

The man had been watching closely from where he stood. He swayed slightly but spoke firmly and the gun did not waver. "Thank you. Now if you'll be so kind as to stand up and move away from the desk — " And from its appurtenances, too, the man obviously meant, his eye having lingered on the heavy inkwell.

Professor Chechele rose slowly. A Shakespearean speech intoned itself across his mind.

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on,
And our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

The spy took the professor's chair once more. He pressed his right arm to his chest, causing himself obvious but seemingly necessary pain. Still holding himself together. He sat a moment studying the address carefully. "Just so. Admirable handwriting, sir. Most legible."

He helped himself to the proper amount of postage from the professor's stamp box, and one-handedly stuffed the stolen plans inside the envelope, then sealed the flap firmly and pocketed the envelope. "Now to post this in a nearby pillar box."

Professor Chechele drew a deep breath. "I rather fancy you intend to leave me trussed up whilst you make your escape. You may use the curtain cords."

The spy smiled painfully. "Nice try, sir. But you know better than that. From talk at Sir George's, I'm aware that you are a professor and live alone. But surely a daily will show up tomorrow, one of your

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colleagues or students. You would at once notify the authorities, who would intercept the plans before they reached Stratford On Avon and arrest my courier at the White Swan."

A great sadness swept over Professor Chechele. So much to do, so much he would have to leave undone.

The spy looked suddenly a deathly gray, drained of blood, and for a moment the professor had hope. But the spy drew strength from his feverish will and held the pistol steady on the professor.

"Sorry, professor. I feel badly about having to do this."

Professor Chechele smiled sorrowfully. He raised a finger. " 'I feel badly' means that your sense of touch is defective. You feel *bad* about — "

The shot cut him off.

Morlock shook his head. "Right to the end." He grimaced. He himself hadn't much longer. His face twisted and his body arched. He was in the squeeze of a great fist, the grip of death. But he would last till he had posted the envelope, then crawl to a hedgerow and hide. Let death seek him there.

The postmaster glared at the envelope. The address was plain — all too plain. A. Tobit, Esq., The White Swan, Stratford On Avon.

He turned his attention to the printed address of the sender, a name he knew well. The postmaster's anger mounted. To think that the professor, who had so vigorously supported his crusade, should now defect or suffer a lapse.

Vehemently, the postmaster stamped the envelope "Address Unknown. Return to Sender." The world had to learn to call Shakespeare's birthplace by its correct name. It was Stratford-upon-Avon, not Stratford On Avon. The postmaster was adamant in his desire to keep the name straight. Anyone who wished to correspond with an inhabitant of Stratford-upon-Avon would have to learn that. +

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Kurt Thompson watched the storm clouds swirling out of the northeastern sky. Masses of dark wind churned menacingly. The air seemed to tumble over itself like thick lava rushing down the sides of an erupting volcano.

Three stories below the balcony on which Thompson stood, a handful of Caribbean beach boys scurried to secure the beach cabana where the towels and chairs were stored. Flags were raised to warn the unknowing of the impending winds. Within the hour, the burning sunshine that blazed across the tiny island would be hidden behind the rolling storm clouds.

The weather would delay Susan's arrival. She hadn't been able to leave New York on Tuesday as planned — an emergency modeling job that would pay double-time. She'd told Kurt to go along without her; she'd fly down on the next available flight. Now Susan was stuck in San Juan until the storm passed, and the

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The Hurricane Courier

meteorologists were guessing at anywhere from 12 to 48 hours.

"You cannot predict the wind," the man had told Kurt over the telephone.

Thompson took the keys to the rental car from his pocket and twirled them around his finger and then snapped them into his palm. Storm or no, he was going out.

The man in the dark blue sedan tapped the hard steering wheel. He checked his watch. He glanced into the rear-view mirror, looked away, then looked behind the car once again. The curving dirt road on which he'd parked was deserted, as it had been since his arrival 37 minutes before.

He checked his watch. Tapped the steering wheel. Eyed the rear-view mirror.

Situated southwest of a slope lined with lush foliage, he didn't see the approaching clouds until the heavy round drops of rain splattered across his windshield. The raindrops hit the

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ground with such force that bits of dust jumped from the road until the earth became saturated enough to hold the dirt down. The sky darkened quickly.

"The storm is early." The man spoke out loud. "It's not supposed to come until tomorrow," he protested to no one, raising his voice.

He banged his fist against the console, then wiped his palm over the inside of the windshield that fogged from the sudden drop in temperature that accompanied the rain. He checked his watch.

"She's late, goddammit. She's late."

There was a noise. He looked into the rear-view mirror, but couldn't see anything for the streaking lines of silver rain.

She departed the 727 carrying a nylon flight bag that she hung over her shoulder. One of the ground crew workers whistled at her, as she walked across the hot asphalt near the terminal. She smiled back politely, her expression making it clear that her response was not an invitation, only thanks.

The purple-inked seal was stamped on her passport at Customs without question. She was not required to fill out the usual forms.

The car rental kiosk was without a line. She walked directly to the counter. "Tessa George," she said. "You have a car for me."

The thin man behind the counter, more tactful than most, waited until Tessa had lowered her eyes to sign the rental agreement before allowing his own eyes to feast upon her body; the sheer white material of her sundress allowed a perfect view of her smallish breasts. He smiled.

Tessa pushed the completed form back across the counter to him.

"You were quite lucky, Miss George," the man said, as he tore her copy of the agreement from the binder. "Your flight was the last allowed in today."

"Why is that?"

"Storm. Hurricane's here ahead of schedule."

Tessa had seen the clouds to the northeast as her plane had approached the island, but she hadn't realized the swiftness of their approach. "How long until it starts?" she asked, suddenly tense.

The man shrugged. "Half hour. Maybe more. Maybe less."

Tessa took the car keys and ran towards the exit, clutching the flight bag to her shoulder to keep from dropping it and holding the front of her dress to keep it from coming undone.

Two hours later, she was soaking wet. Her hair hung in wet clumps against her shoulders and her dress was stuck to her body like a second layer of skin. She shivered with cold as she shut herself into a phone booth just outside of town and dialed a series of 23 digits, pausing at predesignated times to wait until

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the ring of a connecting line would patch her through to a new dial tone.

"Ten-six-one-oh-three."

"Courier. Number seven-five-nine-seven. Grid six. Latitude twenty-three. Response nine-nine-nine."

The line went dead.

Tessa hung up.

The phone rang.

When she answered, she repeated the code she had relayed to the central operator.

"You've got three minutes," a voice told her, establishing the amount of time during which it was safe to speak before an interception unit could pinpoint the location of her call.

Tessa recognized the voice as that of Field Supervisor Boxley, the head of CIA, West Indies. "Rendezvous incomplete," she said. "Pick-up agent fatality. One shot, presumably a pistol, to the temple. Fatal shot delivered at rendezvous site."

A series of clicking sounds bit through the long-distance connection. "We can't get to you because of the storm. You're going to have to hold on until it passes." Boxley awaited her reply, heard none, then asked, "Is that clear?"

Tessa said that it was, shouting to be heard over the wind. She couldn't tell if Boxley had disconnected at the other end or not, but she assumed he had and did likewise.

Clutching her flight bag, she leaned back in the glass enclosure and listened to the wind whipping through the trees as the rain thudded threateningly against the metal top of the phone booth. She didn't know what she was carrying in the flight bag, except that it was a sealed, padded envelope about the size and weight of a hardcover book. Whatever it was, it was worth killing for. The man she was supposed to have met in the parked, dark blue sedan was dead. If the storm hadn't come crashing down all over the island, whomever had killed the man in the car might have waited nearby to kill her, too.

And that would remain a possibility until she passed the secret parcel onto whomever would be assigned to take the dead man's place.

With only a vague idea as to what to do next, Tessa drove slowly into town. She was cold. Turning on the little car's heater didn't help; the heater didn't work. Who would expect to have to use a heating unit on a Caribbean island? Tessa wondered, shivering as she flicked the fan switch back to its off position.

It was difficult to make out the shop signs along the side of the street as she entered the town. What the rain didn't blur, the wind did, wrenching signs wildly from side to side, banging them against the front walls of the shops to which they were attached.

Leaving the engine running, and turning on her emergency flashers, Tessa pulled close to the curb in

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front of what looked to be a small grocery store. Once inside, she saw a short man with a balloon-like belly standing beside a refrigerated meat-case. His dark eyes were no more than black slits between his puffy cheeks and the overhang of his sloping forehead.

Tessa felt her grip on the flight bag tighten. She stayed just inside the front door. "I only need some paper. Like the kind you wrap meat in," she said, pointing to a roll of dull brown paper that sat atop the refrigerated case.

The man shrugged. "How much?" he asked.

Tessa held out her hands, measuring off about a yard.

The man unrolled slightly more than Tessa requested and ran a long meat knife down its width to cut it off. "Anything other?" he asked, not seeming to care at all what she wanted with the paper.

"Masking tape," Tessa said. She walked towards him, her hold on the flight bag easing. "La cinta?" she asked, wondering if that was the correct term in Spanish.

He bent over behind the counter, pushing aside a few objects before standing up with a half-used roll of two-inch wide tape.

"Fine," Tessa smiled, unzipping the side pocket to the flight bag to remove her wallet. "How much?"

She paid what he asked, then folded the brown paper into her flight bag along with the masking tape and made for the front door. She ran out into the rain but never saw the man standing by her car until she hit him. She went flying. Her dress tore as she fell to the cement walkway and the flight bag dropped off her shoulder. Scurrying in the blinding rainfall, she pawed over the sidewalk trying to find her bag.

The man's hand grabbed her arm, pulling her to her feet, and handed her the flight bag as he pulled her under the cover of a nearby awning. The rain screamed down as the wind flapped hard against the canvas overhang.

"Are you all right?" the man nearly shouted, to be heard over the weather.

Tessa found his eyes; they were warm and brown. Friendly. She shook her head.

Without seeming at all self-conscious, the man adjusted the front of Tessa's water-drenched sundress to cover her exposed right breast. "I hope that's not your car," the man said, pointing to the two-door Toyota she'd rented at the airport.

The car's left fender was smashed in. The right rear wheel had jumped the sidewalk upon impact; it was now bent and without air.

"I didn't even see it until it was too late. The left flasher wasn't working, just the right; I thought it was only a motorcycle or something."

Tessa didn't speak. Her hand shook where it touched his forearm.

"Can I take you somewhere?" he

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asked.

"I don't think you told me your name," she responded.

"Kurt. Kurt Thompson."

It took Thompson an hour to negotiate through the storm and make it back to his hotel. He took Tessa to his room and gave her the use of his shower.

While she was towelling off inside the steam-filled bathroom, Thompson stuck his hand inside, holding a terrycloth robe.

"This doesn't look like your size," Tessa said, tying the robe at her waist.

"It's my girlfriend's robe."

Tessa drew her wet hair back into a ponytail and let herself out of the bathroom. "She won't mind my being here?"

"Not if she doesn't know," Thompson smiled, propped up on the room's only bed, sitting atop the covers in dry clothes.

"Where is she?"

"Puerto Rico. She was flying in from New York when the storm hit."

"She's stranded there and I'm stranded here." Tessa had fabricated a story about having checked out of her hotel to fly home only to be grounded by the hurricane. "Did you have a chance to check any of the nearby hotels for a room for me, while I was showering?"

Thompson smiled. "They're all booked solid. Hurricane freaks. They all rushed in as soon as they heard a storm was about to hit."

Tessa sat on the sofa across from his bed, and yawned. "I think I'm about to be anti-social," she said softly, closing her eyes.

When she fell asleep, Thompson carried her to the bed and put her under the covers. With his newfound friend resting comfortably, Thompson stood by the balcony door and watched the storm continue to roll sheets of hard, slanting rain through the sky. Hours later, he joined her in bed.

It was still dark outside, probably the middle of the night, Thompson thought, when he felt Tessa's weight shifting. She got out of bed. He watched her take her flight bag from beside the sofa, open it, and take out a folded rectangle of brown paper and a roll of masking tape.

She folded the paper over and over until its size was reduced to that of a book. Trying to remain quiet, she wrapped two bands of tape around the paper's width and two more bands around its length.

She put the tape back into the flight bag and then stuffed the folded and taped paper under the seat cushion of the chair that sat near the bathroom door. She checked the door to their room, making sure it was locked, and then got back into bed beside Thompson.

He pretended to sleep through the incident and lay there silently, wondering what he'd just seen take place.

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Thompson was awake, watching the sky lighten to a medium grey, Tessa asleep beside him, when the phone rang. The shrill bell awakened Tessa with a start and she bolted upright as though shot from a spring.

Thompson picked up the phone.

"Are you expecting a call?" Tessa asked, before he could say hello.

Thompson shook his head, no. He listened to his caller, thanked him, and hung up.

"What was that?" Tessa's eyes shone fiercely, like a tiger's; her pulse pumped visibly in her neck.

Thompson shrugged, getting out of bed. "The desk manager said someone was coming up with a delivery for me." He put on his pants.

Tessa grabbed a fistful of the sheets. "Oh God. They've found me!"

Thompson saw her panicked expression. "What are you talking about?"

"They must have traced the rental car to me, and someone else must have taken down your license plate number when you hit my car." Tessa got out of bed and paced the floor. "How else could they have connected me to you?"

"What's going on?" Tessa's seemingly irrational actions were beginning to frighten him.

"I haven't got time to explain," she replied tensely, stripping off her bathrobe and grabbing his arm. "Just do what I say." She ripped the belt from the waistband of his pants, handed it to him, and then sat in a chair by the balcony door and placed her arms and legs behind the chair as though she were tied into that position. "Hit me with the belt," she demanded urgently, "and shout that I should tell you where *it* is."

"What!"

"Just do it. Hurry up, he'll be here soon. Hit me hard. Across my chest."

"What the hell . . . ?"

"Goddammit, Kurt, just do it or we might both get killed."

Thompson's hands trembled at her threatening words. "Where is it?" he asked.

"Louder," Tessa whispered. "Shout it. Like you mean it."

"Where is it?" Thompson screamed.

"That's it; keep it up. And hit me." She saw him hesitate. "Go ahead, dammit."

"Tell me where it is!" Thompson yelled. He drew back the belt and sent it half-heartedly onto her bicep.

"Harder! It's got to seem real. And keep yelling."

He cracked her right breast with the leather. The sound of her flesh being whipped snapped through the air. "Where is it! Tell me!"

The locked door to their hotel room came crashing open, propelled from the door frame by a forceful kick. A tall, muscular man with a silenced .38 charged into the room.

"Thank God you're here!" Tessa yelped. "It's under the seat cushion

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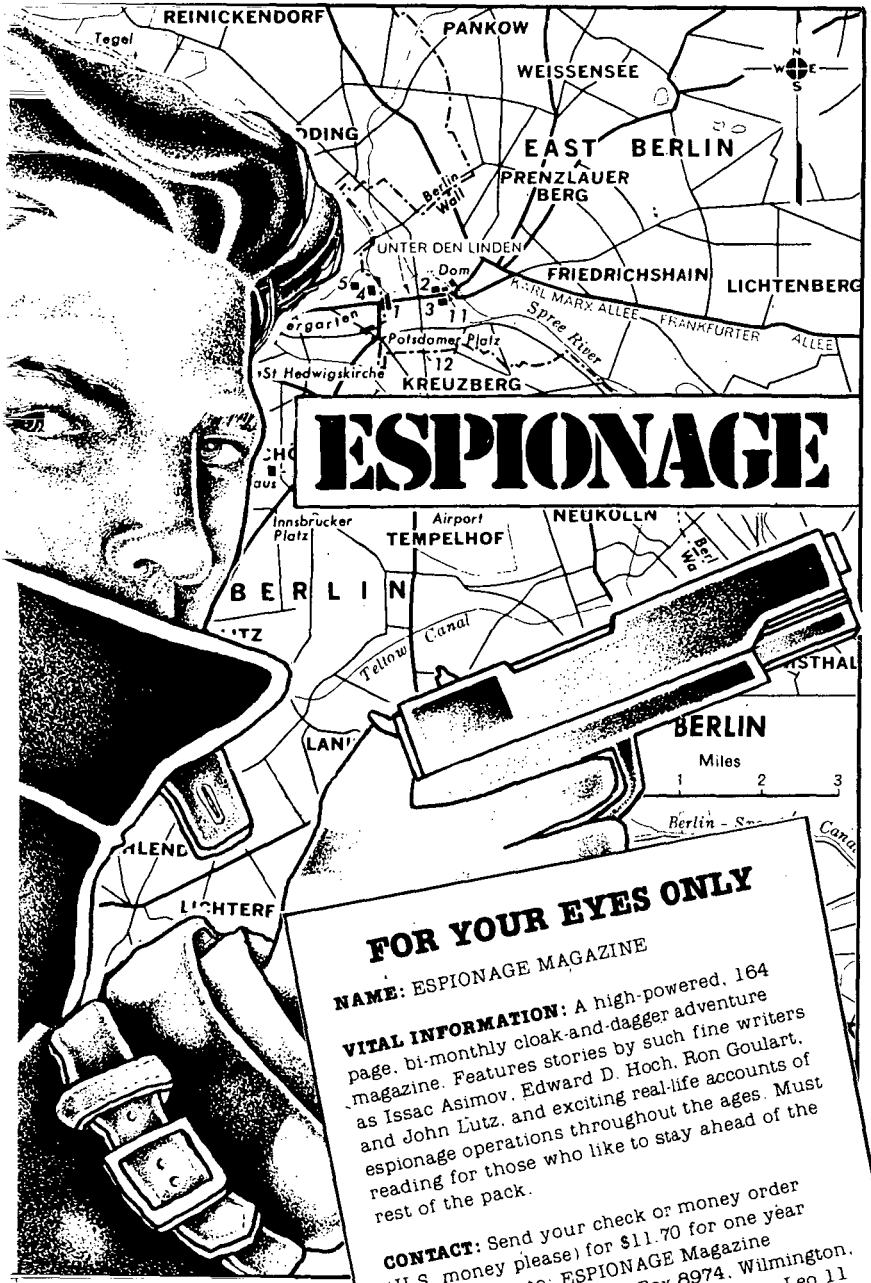

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right next to you. Hurry up. There's another guard down the hall."

His gun pointed at Thompson, the intruder threw back the chair's cushion and took the taped package.

Tessa lunged out of the chair, knocking Thompson down with a naked body block. "Get going!" she screamed to the gunman. "I can take care of him."

The assailant had what he'd come for. He stuffed his gun into a holster strapped to his belt and ran from the room.

Tessa stood, grabbed the terrycloth robe from the foot of the bed and got into it. "Let's go," she told Thompson, helping him to his feet. "Get your shirt on." She grabbed her flight bag and headed for the door.

Thompson appeared dazed.

"He's going to be back here within minutes. If he doesn't realize that the package is a phoney, he's suddenly going to wonder how I was able to knock you to the ground when it looked like I was tied up."

Moving as though caught in a slow-motion playback, Thompson pulled on his shirt. "Why did you knock me down?"

"Because it suddenly occurred to me that the gunman might think I was in danger, and since he saw that I thought he was an ally, he may have killed you to save me from that danger." Tessa grabbed Thompson's arm. "Now let's go."

They ran barefooted towards the stairs, and took the three flights, two steps at a time. Reaching the beach level, they ran into the pelting rain and raced for the hotel down near the point. They were both soaked through by the time they reached the overhang of the neighboring hotel's rear entrance.

Tessa pulled together the front of her robe. "Phone?" she asked an idle employee of the hotel.

The man looked at Tessa's figure, glanced at Thompson, took in her figure once more, and then pointed down the hall.

Her flight bag gripped tightly beneath her arm, Tessa ran down the tile floor, leaving wet footprints behind her. She had already closed herself into the phone booth by the time Thompson caught up.

She repeated the process she'd used the day before, after having found the man in the dark blue sedan dead.

Field Supervisor Boxley came onto the other end. "We have a new rendezvous, effective immediately." He ticked off 35 seconds worth of code that told Tessa to return to where she'd found the dead man yesterday, and disconnected.

"What's going on?" Thompson pleaded when Tessa came out of the phone booth.

"I can't explain now. I need a car."

"In this weather?"

Tessa adjusted her robe again. The soggy material was drooping down from her shoulders and chest. "Is there a rental car agency in this

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place?"

Thompson saw her determination. "Take mine if you've got to do this."

Tessa shook her head. "I can't. That's how they traced me in the first place." She smacked her hand against the flight bag. "I don't have much time."

Thompson considered his mystery woman. "What's in that bag? Who do you work for?"

"I don't know and I can't tell you," she responded, answering both questions honestly.

Thompson turned towards the exit. "Come on. I'll steal you a car."

She followed him into the parking lot. The rain beat down hard around them, bouncing off the rooftops of the parked cars. The lot was deserted as Thompson walked quickly between the rows of automobiles, looking for one that was unlocked.

"You really know how to do this?" Tessa asked when he'd found an unsecured Datsun.

Thompson didn't reply. Taking a piece of torn sheet metal he'd pulled out of the dumpster near the edge of the lot, he popped the ignition switch. He quickly crossed a set of wires, and the car began to struggle to life. Thompson reached down to pump the accelerator with his hand. The car's engine turned over and revved strongly. "You want me to drive?" Thompson asked.

Standing in the rain, with her wet hair hanging in drenched clumps around her shoulders, Tessa shook her head. "I can't take you with me, Kurt. I'm sorry."

He got out of the driver's compartment.

Tessa sat in the wet seat, tossing her flight bag onto the passenger seat. "I'll call you some time and explain all this," she said, closing the door. She backed out of the parking space and stopped. Rolling down her window, she stuck her head out into the pouring rain. "Thanks."

He was drinking a rum on the rocks with lime when the phone rang.

"Kurt?" the far-away sounding voice asked. "Are you alone?"

"Tessa. Are you all right? What the hell happened? Where are you?" He couldn't believe it was her. Once the clouds had carried off the rain, and the sun had reappeared, he'd almost convinced himself that the beautiful girl with her secret package had been a mere mirage.

She explained as much to him as she could without breaching security. "Is your girlfriend there?" Tessa finally asked.

Thompson swigged his drink. "She went back to New York. Puerto Rico was all the sun she could take."

"You're alone, then . . . "

"Yes."

"I could be there in ten minutes . . . "

"I can come get you . . . "

"I'll wait . . . "

"I'll hurry . . . " →

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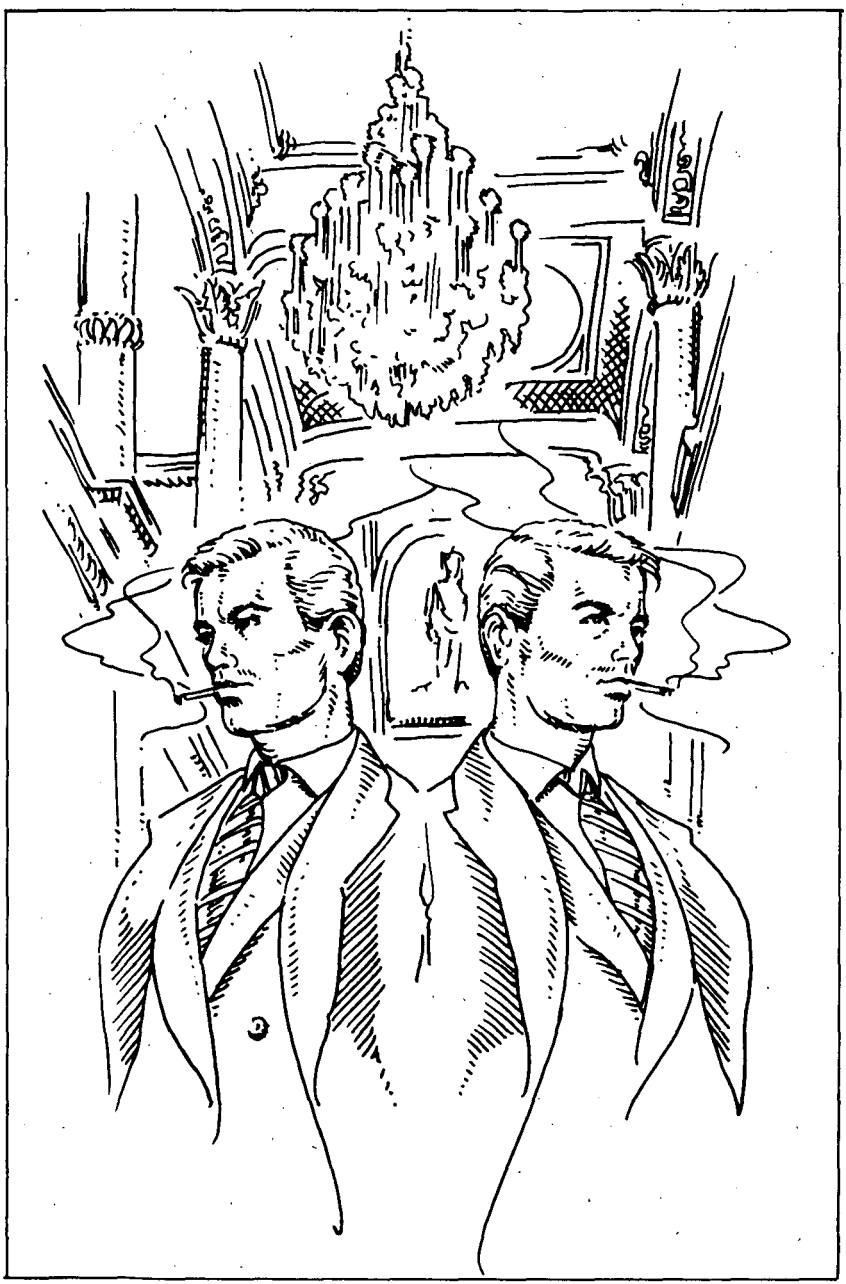

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The Foreign Minister's Brother

by Stuart Symons

It all started like this. I was to kill a man and the Foreign Minister wasn't to know about it. The man I was to kill was the Foreign Minister's brother. His name was Alfred Keating. His mistress, it turned out, had been working all along for the East Germans. And dear old Alfred had been giving her our secrets. Anna Metz, that was her name, had already gone over. At least one of our agents in Vienna had heard she had. Alfred had supposedly gone into hiding, but had been seen by the same agent at the opera in Vienna. Foolish Alfred. Every agent in the West looking for him and he attends the opera. All of this, of course, according to C, who had always hated the Foreign Minister, but evidently hated his brother even more. Personally, I didn't even know the Foreign Minister had a brother.

But anyway, that's how it all started and that's why, as soon as C had telephoned me and given me the information, I had taken the first British Airways flight to Vienna.

"Your Perrier, Mr. Coulter."

I took the glass from the pretty flight attendant and drank a sip. I wanted a whiskey, but the doctor had said, no more, if I wanted to live. Actually I hadn't, until I had received C's telephone call about

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Keating. But now, well . . .

The man across the aisle from me looked like an American businessman. He was working hard on an annual report. He was also drinking a whiskey and it didn't seem to be bothering him. I tried to pretend that the Perrier was something else, but it didn't work. I was just about to exchange it for a whiskey when we hit an air pocket, spilling the American's drink all over him and his annual report. That amused me until we landed in Flughafen-Schwechat outside Vienna 30 minutes later.

Harris, my contact in Austria, met me.

"He's been seen again," he said. We were inside his BMW and headed into the inner city.

"Who?" I asked. I was looking absently at the bleak winter scenes outside the car window.

"Keating." He looked at me. "Alfred Keating. Whom did you think?"

"I know, I know. I was just wondering, do you have any whiskey?"

"Here? You mean in the car?"

"Yes," I said.

"No. No, I don't."

"Too bad."

"At the hotel, perhaps. Won't that be soon enough?" He looked disgusted. "Why don't you get out, Coulter?" he said. "You're tired."

"I'm not ready," I said. "I'll get out when I'm ready."

We rode the rest of the way in silence.

We were in my room at the Hotel Imperial. I was lying on the bed. Harris was seated in a chair next to me. I had one whiskey under my belt, another on the way. Harris had a disgusted look on his face, still, but at least he was talking again.

"They're twins, you know," he said.

"No, I didn't know," I said. I took another sip of whiskey. "I suppose you mean the Foreign Minister

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and his brother."

"Exactly."

He stood up, walked to the window, and looked out. Then he opened it. The cold air covered me on the bed. I could hear the sounds of the people on the Kärntnerring below. I wondered if Alfred Keating was among them. I sat up.

"No, I actually didn't know they were twins," I said. "In fact, I have to be honest with you. I didn't even know the Foreign Minister had a brother until C told me."

I noticed that Harris looked nervous.

"Most people don't," he said. He walked away from the window and sat down. "He has always avoided public life."

"Yes, but surely . . . "

Harris interrupted me.

"It's just that the Foreign Minister cannot afford a scandal at this particular point in his career, not with the Labour Party boys breathing down his neck."

"And C has decided that the best way to avoid this is to do away with the Foreign Minister's brother?"

Harris went to the bathroom. In a minute, I heard a flush, following by running water in the basin. He came back into the room and sat down.

"That's about it," he said. It was as though he had never left.

Then he stood up abruptly.

"We think he'll be at the opera again tomorrow night. There's a performance of 'The Magic Flute.' He has a special fondness for Mozart. Follow him after he leaves. Kill him anywhere. Just make sure he's dead."

"How will I recognize him?"

"You haven't been listening, Coulter. He and the Foreign Minister are twins. You'll recognize him."

Harris left. I stared at the door for a few minutes, then drank the rest of the whiskey.

The service at the Hotel Imperial is superb. It

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always has been, even in the old days. I had another bottle of whiskey in my room in five minutes. In another fifteen minutes, I was asleep.

I was shattered awake by the telephone — only it stopped ringing. A wrong number. My heart was pounding. It was dark. I listened carefully. But there was only the sound of traffic on the Kärntnerring. And it was bitterly cold in the room. I got up to shut the window. But standing there, looking out at the city, it suddenly felt good. Instead of closing the window, I opened it wider. Vienna. The secrets I knew. The years when I had been on top. When they called me first to do a job, because I was good. They knew I was good. I'd be good again.

I went back to bed and slept soundly.

The next morning, I ate breakfast, then took a tram to the Prater, so I could ride the Riesenrad. I had killed my first man in one of the box-like cars of that huge ferris wheel. It was 1950. The man had been supplying me with information about Soviet operations in their sector of Vienna, but he was getting scared. He was a minor official in their Ministry of Information. He thought they knew about him. He was sure he was being followed and he was afraid they would send him to Siberia. He wanted to go to London and wanted me to make all the arrangements for him and his family. *I can't,* I had said. *Nobody knows about you.* It had been a shock to him. He had thought all along that London knew who he was. When he threatened to expose me, I killed him and left him in the car. I heard somebody scream when he was found, but I was already in the crowd on the ground and gone. He was the first one. Nobody knew about that one. The ones I'd be told to kill would come later.

I had the car completely to myself. We had reached the top and had stopped. I could see Stephansdom, the Danube, and the Vienna Woods. I could almost hear the strains of a Strauss waltz. Somewhere out there was Alfred Keating, eating,

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drinking, making love — if he had found a new mistress, and his kind usually did. Somewhere out there he was living the last day of his life.

I went back to the hotel and slept through lunch.

Later, I found a small bookshop just off the Kärntnerring, bought a copy of Graham Greene's *Der Dritte Mann, The Third Man* in English, and sat down on a park bench and began reading it.

Years ago I had seen the film and had been amazed at how it had captured the mood of Vienna in the late 40s. Those had been the good years, the good years for me, the years when I had been on top. It was nothing like the city today

I watched the young couples strolling by arm-in-arm, huddled together to feel each other and to keep warm. They paid no attention to me. It was getting colder. I turned up the collar to my coat and continued to read.

On the walk back to the hotel, it suddenly occurred to me that Keating might possibly not show up. I started to sweat. He had to. He was my last chance. But what if he didn't? What if he decided to attend the opera some other night? Or not at all? What if he had left Vienna already? I felt myself getting sick. I had to have a drink.

I ate a light dinner. The whiskey had calmed my nerves some, but I was still worried. I needed to be given a chance to prove that I was still capable. I had the chance now. Keating couldn't let me down. Tonight had to be the night.

I sat in the lobby and read *Neues Österreich* through twice. My hands were shaking and I felt myself getting short of breath. I smoked two packages of Gitanes. At 11:30, I left the hotel and walked to the corner of Kärntnerstrasse and the Opernring and stood by the tram stop. I would be able to see Keating leave the opera unnoticed. I would follow him until we reached a dark area and then I would shoot him, using the silencer. I didn't like being so close when I killed people, because it

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was messy. But I had to make sure that everything went according to plan. I had to make sure he was dead. This was it. In the morning, I knew I'd be back on top. It had all started in Vienna. It was fitting that it should all begin again in Vienna, too.

He didn't show up. I waited until the trams stopped running, then walked back to the hotel. My hands and legs were numb from the cold. Damn him! Damn that Keating!

There was a bottle of whiskey on the stand beside my bed. I had ordered it earlier for a celebration. Now I used it to warm up and to kill the pains of defeat.

Sleep came hard, but finally.

Someone was knocking at the door. I opened my eyes. The sun from the open drapes blinded me. The knocking continued. My head was pounding. I stood up, walked unsteadily to the door, and opened it. It was Harris.

"He's been seen in Berlin," he said. "They think now that he'll try to go over that way. Clean up, get dressed, and get something in your stomach besides whiskey. I have you booked on the noon Austrian Airways flight to Berlin."

We hadn't even leveled off, but I needed to go to the W.C. After Harris had left me this morning I had been sick. Of course, there were a number of reasons why, but it was mostly the realization that I'd have another chance. It would be easier in Berlin. I knew all the possible escape routes into the East, routes that people like Keating had counted on since The Wall.

"Are you all right, Herr Coulter?" It was the flight attendant.

"Do you have any mineral water? It's my stomach. I think it might help."

"I'll get you some right away," she said.

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We flew low over the city and landed at Tempelhof. Willis, our agent in Berlin, met me.

"We've booked you into the Hilton," he said. "We thought you'd like it there."

"Thanks," I said. "Where was he last seen?"

"Keating?"

"Whom did you think?"

"Oh, yes, right. Well, it was the uh . . . Café Stolz in the Kürfurstendamm. At least we think it was Keating. After all, he and the Foreign Minister are twins and the man looked like him."

After I had checked into the hotel, I walked to the Café Stolz. It was a relatively new cafe. I sat down and waited. Finally, a waiter came.

"Ein Whiskey, bitte," I said.

He left, returned, and I drank. I waited for Keating through four whiskeys, hoping that he would show up again, but he didn't. Then I went back to my hotel.

I lay for a while on the bed drinking whiskey. Could Keating already be somewhere else, I wondered? Did he know I was chasing him? Was it a game he was playing with me? God, if I could only talk to C and tell him how much I wanted to succeed. I think he'd understand. He had trained me. He knew how good I had been. He must still have some faith in me or he wouldn't have given me this assignment.

I needed to talk to someone. I didn't want to talk to Willis. He was young and the young ones hated you. They were just like jackals, waiting for you to fall and then they'd eat you alive. I tried to think. Everyone I had known in Berlin was either dead or retired to the Bahamas, left to rot in the tropics. If I ever retired, I'd go up north, to Stockholm, perhaps, or to Helsinki, but never to an island in the Caribbean, left to sit around some hotel pool, with a drink in my hand, turning brown.

The telephone rang. It was Willis.

"He has a meeting tonight," he said. "One of my

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contacts just told me. They think he's making arrangements to go over, maybe even after the meeting. It has to be tonight, Coulter."

God, I wanted to cry. Why was Willis doing this for me? My blood was surging.

"Tell me the address," I said. I was finding it hard to contain my excitement. To think that one of the young ones was giving me my chance. I'd remember Willis for this. I really would. I wouldn't tell him now. I didn't want him to think I was so desperate. But I'd remember.

"21 Kochstrasse, apartment two, near The Wall. Be careful. It's important, this job. Make the first shot count, Coulter. Make sure he's dead." There was a moment of silence. I was breathing heavily into the phone. Then Willis added, "And Coulter, I know how much this means to you. I really do."

"Thank you, Willis," I said.

I hung up the receiver. My hands were shaking. I sat down on the bed. I needed a drink. I went to the hotel bar and had a couple of whiskeys. I felt steadier, better than I had felt in a long time.

I left the hotel at midnight and walked to Kochstrasse. The apartment house at number 21 was one of the many that had been built hurriedly after the war as temporary housing. Most of them were still being used.

Apartment two was on the ground floor, at the rear of the building. It had a garden, thick with bushes and vines. Even leafless, they offered a good cover. I let myself in the gate. I tried a door. It was locked. But the lock was old and easily broken. The odor that hit me when I opened the door was of expensive perfume. I was surprised, but excited. This was it. I could hear voices faintly. I walked as softly as I could, letting the voices direct me. I passed through a kitchen and a sitting room. The voices were coming from the bedroom. I opened the door slowly. In the dim light I could see a man and woman lying naked on the bed. The man saw me

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immediately.

"What the hell . . . who are you . . . "

The woman covered herself and started to scream.

"Don't," I said. "I'll not harm you." I pointed my gun. "It's him I want. Stand up, Keating!"

He stood up beside the bed. It was incredible. Alfred Keating and the Foreign Minister did look exactly alike.

"Do you mind if I put my pants on, old man?" Keating said.

"Stay where you are!"

I continued to stare. I couldn't get over it.

"It's incredible, you know," I said.

"What is?"

"How much you look like your brother."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about your brother, the Foreign Minister."

"You obviously know I'm the Foreign Minister or you wouldn't be here," he said sarcastically. "What is it you want? Are you planning to blackmail me because I have a German mistress?"

The man was laughing at me.

I could feel the sweat pouring off my skin. My stomach was churning. I knew I should have had another drink before I came.

"I don't understand. I thought . . . "

"Get up, Anna," he said. "Get dressed." It was obvious that he thought he was now in control of the situation.

"Anna?" I said. "Anna Metz?"

"Yes," the woman said slowly. "How did you know my name?" She turned and looked at Keating. He was visibly shaken.

"Stay where you are, both of you," I said. "Where's the telephone?"

Anna pointed to a table next to the bed. I picked up the receiver and dialed C's private number in London.

"It's done," I said, when C answered. "He's dead."

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There was a pause, then C said, "What are you talking about, old man?"

"The Foreign Minister's brother. He's dead."

There was another pause, then C said slowly, "We need to talk, Coulter. We've been needing to talk for a long time. You're tired. You need out. Several of your friends in the Bahamas have been asking about you. Perhaps you'd like to visit them for a while. It would help you make up your mind."

"I don't understand," I said. "I did what you asked me to do."

"But Coulter," C said, "the Foreign Minister doesn't have a brother."

"I see," I said, and hung up the receiver.

I turned to the Foreign Minister and Anna.

"Put on your clothes, both of you."

"I wish you'd explain what the hell is going on," the Foreign Minister said.

"I shall," I said, "but first, would you happen to have any whiskey in the house?" →

Did you know...

The telephone is one of the easiest methods by which to transmit information, but also one of the least secure. Tactical military formations frequently use radio-telephones for communication, although they and the enemy are well aware of the value of eavesdropping.

To counteract this problem, a most ingenious and thoroughly secure method of telephone security was developed by the United States Marine Corps in the Pacific during WW II. Near the end of the war, the Corps had 420 Navaho Indians specifically assigned to radio-telephone communications. Called "code talkers," they relayed messages in a combination of American slang, Navaho, and military jargon. Navaho was chosen for its complexity (for example "na ildil" means *You are accustomed to eat plural separable objects one at a time*) and because only twenty-eight people outside the tribe could understand it — none of whom were Germans or Japanese!

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THE COMMISSAR

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Ah, how Nadia could run — like a gazelle, like an antelope — for at least ten seconds; Mariska too. For myself, I throw my weight around — which is the hammer.

On the upper deck of this Russian boat which travels to the sports meet in the United States, I stand and eat a sandwich while I watch these Russians at mass exercise, back and forth, right and left, and up and down.

It is not that we Hungarians do not exercise. It is simply that we are more individual about this. We do not want a loud-voice

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on a platform telling us what to do — especially if it is in Russian.

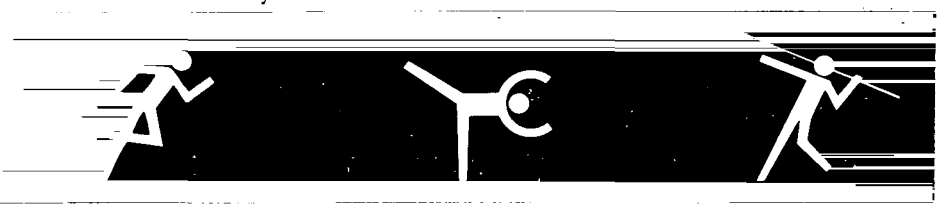
I observe the women's group down below and the overwhelming number of sturdy legs, but Nadia does not have sturdy legs. They are long and at a glance one sees that she can run and probably must, for she has lustrous black hair and violet eyes and one thinks of the ballet rather than the cinder track.

Mariska appears at my side "You are watching Nadia again?" she asked, "That *Russian*?"

Mariska is the fastest woman in all Hungary. This is true also for events in Poland and Italy. However, in Western Germany and France, she comes in second to Nadia in the 100 meter dash.

It is obvious that Mariska is very jealous of Nadia's running — fifty percent of the time, at least — and from the narrowness of her eyes, I have the feeling that in America they will settle this once and for all.

"We should have defected in Germany or France," Mariska says. "Or even Italy."



I shake my head. "No, Mariska. Since our ultimate goal is the freedom of America, does it not pay to remain with the team until it arrives there? In this manner we are assured free passage."

We become aware that Boris Volakov has moved beside us.

Boris is a most unpopular man. He is commissar for the Russian team, plus in overall charge of the voyage. It is a rumor that his unfavorable reports have caused the disappearance of one high-jumper, one long distance runner, and one hop, skip, and jump.

"You are attending the All-Nations Friendship Party on board tomorrow night?" he asks.

With the Russians, we speak English. It is a beautiful language and besides it irritates them.

"I am sorry," Mariska says, "but I am developing a cold."

"I have this trouble with my sinuses," I say. "This always requires forty-eight hours for the cure."

Boris smiles like a shark and is not disturbed. "I have talked to the leaders of all nationalities and they will see that medical problems of that nature are cleared up by the time of the party."

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He looks Mariska up and down. "I have always admired the Hungarians. I have spent some time in Budapest."

"Oh?" Mariska says with great sweetness. "As a tourist?"

He clears his throat. "Not exactly."

Now, on the deck below, the exercises have come to a close and the group is dismissed.

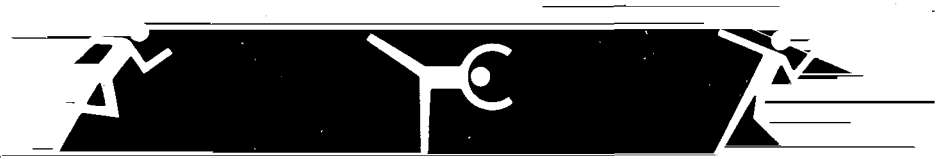
Boris excuses himself and walks toward the iron stairs which lead to the lower decks.

Nadia looks up and sees that he is coming down. Very casually, but firmly, she begins to walk away.

It is interesting to watch — from my height — this pursuit and the evasion, this looking back over the shoulder, this increasing of the pace, this series of sharp right and left turns around lifeboats and funnels.

I study the situation and see that eventually she is about to be trapped — for Boris is tricky and foresighted.

"I think I will go downstairs," I say to Mariska.



She looks at me but says nothing.

I go down the stairs and after five minutes, manage to intercept Nadia. "This way," I say, and take her arm.

"Oh," she says, "it is you again," for we have met and talked before whenever I was able to create the opportunity.

She comes where I take her, which is to crouch behind a winch, and we wait. Soon Boris passes by, the yellow gleam of pursuit still in his eyes.

Nadia takes a deep breath. "So far I have been saved by one thing or another, but I am running out of miracles and excuses."

"Why are excuses even necessary?" I say. "Is not a simple 'no' in his face enough?"

She looks at me like I am a child. "Life is not always that simple. Boris is a man of much influence."

"Ah yes," I say wisely. "I understand that he has sent three men to Siberia."

She smiles, but tightly. "They were not men and they were not sent to Siberia. We are no longer that primitive in the treatment

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of our athletes. They were women who said 'no' and they were simply dismissed from the team. Today they are teaching calisthenics to pre-school children in Kandalaksha, which is just beyond the Arctic Circle, but still in Europe."

"Nadia," I say, "France is a nice country and free — in a capitalistic way, of course — and this is true also of Western Germany and Italy. Why did you not seek asylum in one of these places? It is unlikely that Boris would have continued pursuit."

She shakes her head. "No. I could not do anything like that."

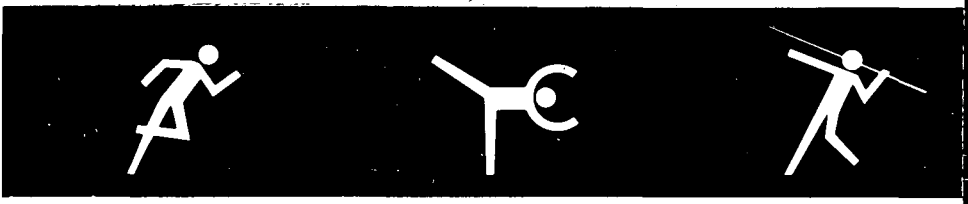
"You have relatives in Russia? They would be liquidated?"

"We no longer liquidate relatives," she says stiffly. "However, I do not wish to leave the team. It is a great honor to be a member and this I would not willingly give up."

I feel anger stirring. "So remaining on the team is of greater importance than your honor?"

She looks frosty. "I would prefer to have both."

She thinks more on the subject of Boris. "He is the commissar



of the athletes," she says bitterly, "but in his life he has yet to run even one hundred meter dash. He is greedy and opportunistic. He goes as the wind blows — whenever it is easiest, wherever he has the most to gain for himself. This is how he has come to his present position, after beginning as the custodian of uniforms. Also, I think that in Russia he was a speculator in the black market, but has always been too clever to be caught."

I rub my jaw. To me has come the expression that if a mountain does not come to the Mohammedans, then it is necessary for the Mohammedans to go to the mountain. "Do not despair," I say, "I will personally work on this problem."

That evening in the dining room, I sit at Boris' table — which is easy, for there is always room — and over tea I ask, "Have you ever been to New York?"

"No," Boris says. "I know nothing about America except that the poor are exploited by the rich."

"How true," I say, and then sigh. "It is unfortunate, but I will not be able to visit my cousin Stephen when we arrive there. He

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is one of these rich exploiters."

Boris is interested. "Rich? But why can you not go see him?"

I smiled sadly. "Because he is a defector and as a loyal member of the party, I certainly would not want to be seen in his presence. He fled from Hungary two years ago."

Boris' mind fastened on one point. "A *rich* defector? Before he defected, did he somehow manage to — ah — transfer money to some Swiss bank? Hm?"

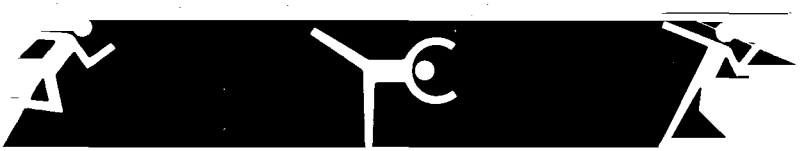
"No," I say. "When Stephen arrived in America, he was penniless."

Boris thinks on this too. "He defected but two years ago, but *today* he is rich?"

I nod. "He has a large estate in Hoboken, a swimming pool, two limousines, three mistresses, and eight horses."

Boris is impressed. "Three? But how did this all happen?"

"It is all the responsibility of his agent, who has the strange American name of John Smith. This John Smith has Stephen's ex-



periences written into a book which has become a best seller. And also it will soon be made into a motion picture in which Stephen will hold a percentage."

Boris is puzzled. "But there are tens of thousands of defectors. Surely not every one of them could write a book and expect to make so much money?"

"Of course not," I say. "But Stephen was an important man behind the Iron... " I clear my throat, " ...in our country. He was a *commissar* overseeing the Fejer Building Institute. Perhaps you have heard of his book? *I Was a Commissar for the F.B.I.?"*

Boris frowns. "It is somehow vaguely familiar."

"People are extremely interested in Stephen," I say. "There is a shortage of commissars in America, for not many of them defect. They know when they have it good."

Boris agrees. "Good, yes. But riches, no." He looks very casual. "This John Smith agent, where does he live, this capitalist pig?"

"In Chicago at a place called State Street. Probably his name is in the telephone book."

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When I rise to leave, Boris is still thinking about my cousin Stephen, who does not exist.

The night of the Friendship Party there comes a thick fog upon the ocean and it is necessary for the ship to slow almost to a halt and blow its horns often. Even so, we almost run into other ships, for we are now near New York and the traffic lanes are heavy.

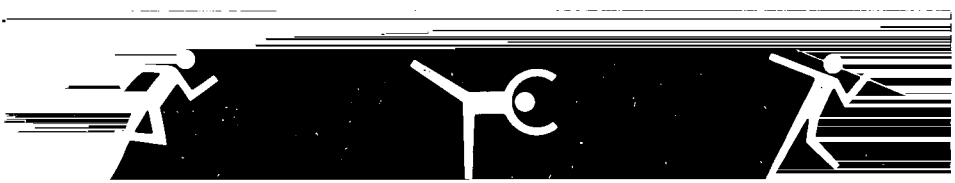
In the dining room, I find that Nadia, Mariska, and I have been assigned to Boris' table.

He talks hardly at all. Mostly he is preoccupied and he drinks a good deal.

It is a yawning evening until ten when there is trouble in the bar among the united Czechoslovakians. The Czechs and the Slovakians begin to fight and the Ruthenians watch and smile.

When order is restored, I notice that Boris has left his previous thoughts and is now looking at Nadia.

His voice is thick with the drink. "Nadia, let us, you and I, walk about the deck."



"No," Nadia says. "The fog is bad for my throat."

"You are not a singer," Boris snaps and then glares at her.

"How would you like to teach calisthenics to pre-school children?"

The band strikes up with dance music and I immediately sweep Nadia upon the floor.

"Nadia," I say, "this is not the moment to spill the soup in the ointment. You must cooperate with Boris for the time being."

She is shocked. "You, of all people, to say *that*?"

I explain hastily. "I mean only for this walk on the foggy deck. You can come to no harm, for I think that he has drunk too much to be dangerous. I even wonder whether he can still walk at all."

She studies me. "Just what are you up to, Janos?"

I smile. "I have a clever plan and I will tell you when it works. I have the feeling that soon you will never see Boris again."

When we return from the dance, Nadia is more friendly and soon she and Boris rise and move toward the door. He walks much better than I anticipate and so I begin to worry.

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Finally I too rise and walk out into the fog. I hesitate. Where have they gone? To the right or to the left? I listen, but I hear nothing.

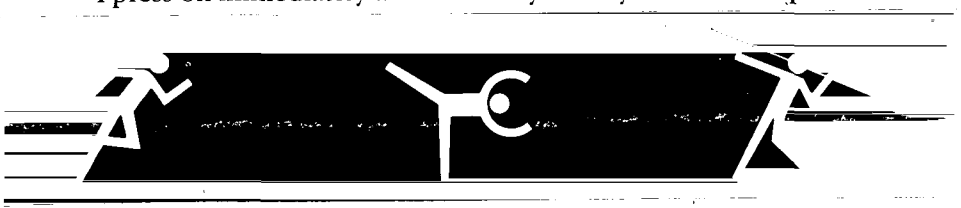
I turn to the right and after a dozen steps I bump into two people who are much close together. I recognize the man as a Czech high-jumper and the woman as a Rumanian gymnast, which is bad politics at the present time, but they do not seem to care.

"Pardon," I say. "Did anyone pass this way recently?"

The man peers into my face and is relieved that I am not a commissar. "No," he says. "Not that we notice."

I go in the opposite direction, bumping into objects occasionally and listening. All I hear is the groan of horns near and far, and when there is no horn noise, it appears that I am in a vacuum of silence. I think that I may have taken the wrong direction after all, but then I hear the commencing of a scream. It is muffled by the fog and yet I feel that it is near.

I press on immediately and after only twenty feet I come upon



Boris and Nadia, and I see that he is considerably less drunk than I had thought. When I see what could be impending, fury springs into my blood and I forget all about Mohammedans and their mountains. I spring forward shouting a nationalist war cry.

Boris is considerably surprised by my entrance out of the fog, but he becomes even more so when I immediately grasp him by one arm and one leg and swing him in a circle...once...twice...and then I let go.

It was a great fling, perhaps a world's record for this type of event. Boris and his scream fly through a thin patch in the fog and over the ship's rail.

Nadia joins me as we look into the swirling white gray which hides the water.

"Was this your clever plan?" she asks.

"No," I say sadly. "There is many a slip between the cup and the ship."

We are now silent and I try to think about this predicament.

"Nadia," I finally say, "I will surrender myself and confess. I

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will say that you were not even here. It was a personal quarrel."

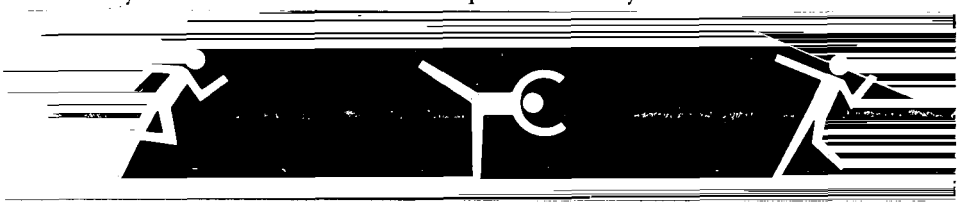
"Nonsense," Nadia says. "Since no one has rushed here, evidently the fog muffled his scream and he was not heard. We will simply walk away. Boris just disappeared and we know nothing about it at all."

"But you were seen leaving the ballroom with him," I say. "There will be questions asked. And there is no Supreme Court to throw out the confession that will inevitably follow."

Nadia offers another idea. "We will say it was an accident which we both witnessed. Boris slipped and fell overboard."

I shook my head. "I do not think we will be believed. It is generally established that commissars do not meet death by accident."

We are silent again and then I sigh. "Nadia, I do not worry for myself. If no one heard the scream, I do not think that Boris will be missed before tomorrow and we will have arrived in New York by then. Freedom is but a leap or dash beyond."



She is wide-eyed. "You are going to defect?"

"Yes," I say. "We have planned upon this for a long time."

The wide eyes become narrow eyes. "We? Who is we?"

"Mariska and I."

Her lips tighten. It is strange how these women athletes are so jealous of each other's ability to run. Among men, there is more sportsmanship.

"America is a big country," I say. "It is big enough for *two* runners of excellence."

"I doubt this," she says, but sighs. "However, I do not think I have much of a choice."

We arrive in clear weather at the Port of New York the next morning. Soon we descend the gangplank while the ship's loudspeaker calls out for Boris to report to his contingent.

There is a rumor — which Nadia and I have started — that Boris has drunk too much and fallen asleep in some corner of the ship.

We step without trouble onto American soil and are taken to the hotel.

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I would have preferred to participate in the sports meet before defecting — as would Nadia and Mariska — but to postpone our defecting could possibly be fatal. So at the first opportunity, the three of us join and find the nearest police station and declare ourselves to be political refugees.

It is something I have never regretted, and three months later — at my wedding — I see Bela, a pole vaulter on our team who also defected, but after the meet. Evidently he has heard that I was to marry and wished to attend the event.

We shake hands and he smiles. "So it was you who threw Boris overboard," he says.

Perhaps I pale a bit, for if this is made public information, I am ruined. The Americans would not shield a murderer, even if the victim is a Russian. "Did you witness the event?" I asked quickly.

He shakes his head. "No. But I have just heard that Boris himself maintains that this happened."

I blinked. "Boris Volakov is alive?"

Bella smiles. "You tossed him overboard just as a small freighter glided past in the fog, and Boris landed unnoticed on the canvas top of a lifeboat. The length of the fall however, rendered him unconscious for perhaps a half hour."

I take a breath of relief.

Bela continues. "When Boris awoke and ascertained that he was alive and on another ship, he rushed immediately to the captain on the bridge and announced that he was declaring himself a political refugee who wished to remain in the west, and he also wanted to send swiftly a radiogram to a Mr. John Smith of State Street, Chicago."

I sighed. "So Boris is now in America?"

Bela smiled again. "No. Unfortunately for Boris, the ship upon which you tossed him turned out to be a Russian freighter."

It was a successful wedding. I was handsome and Nadia, my bride, looked beautiful.

The maid of honor, of course, was Mariska, my sister. →

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HISTORICALLY

He had been captured the night before, a young man on a mission of intrigue. On his person was a Yale diploma and a map outlining British military strength on Long Island. The diploma suggested that he was who he said he was, a loyalist school teacher fleeing revolutionary Connecticut. The map said otherwise. On the morning of September 22, 1776, he was hanged on Manhattan Island, sentenced without trial for spying on the British. His prostrate body dangled for three days — testimony to British will. His last words were recorded by a British sergeant: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

Nathan Hale was reared in Conventry, Connecticut. He entered Yale at the age of fourteen, where he studied the classics. He also found time to become an accomplished wrestler and member of the debating society. He debated with fellow spy and patriot, Benjamin Tallmadge, at their commencement. After graduation, Hale took on the position of teacher of classical languages at the Union Grammar School in New London, Connecticut.

News of the battles at Lexington and Concord reached New London on April 20, 1775. That night, at a town meeting, Hale rose to speak. Addressing his fellow townsfolk with emotion and conviction, he argued not only that they should aid their brethren in Massachusetts — the popular concensus and their subsequent action — but called for independence as well. "Let us march at once and never lay down our arms until independence is won."

Hale remained at the school until the clear call of

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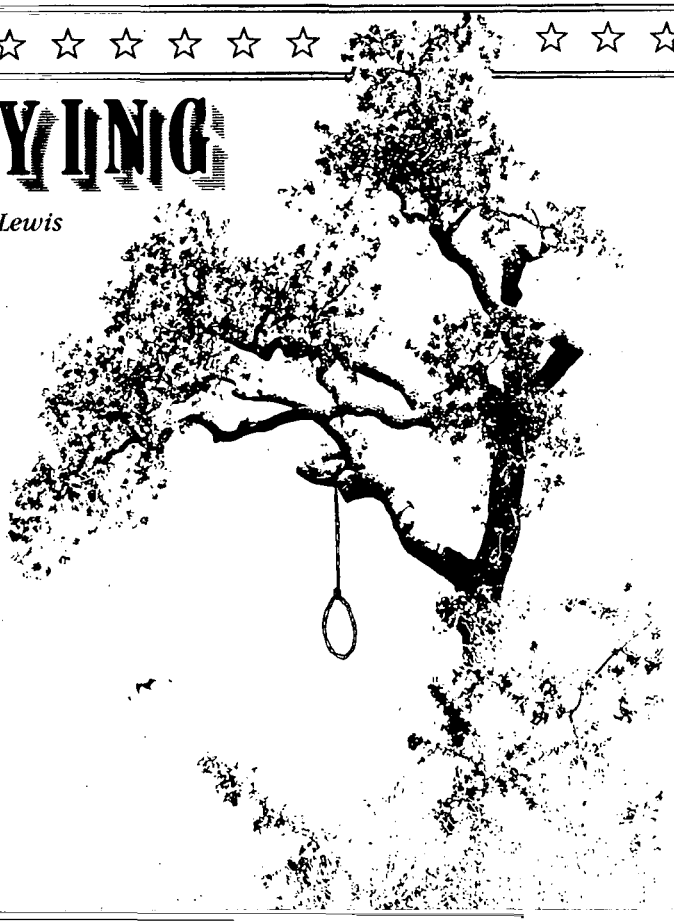
SPYING

by Joe Lewis



duty beckoned him into the army. With characteristic deference to duty and service, Hale explained, "School-keeping is a business of which I was always fond . . . I have thought much of never quitting it but with life; but at present there seems an opportunity for more extensive public service."

Nathan Hale left for the war that summer, and remained a member of various rebel militias for over a year. As enthusiastically as he might have served, however, Hale failed to see any action of consequence. Still he would hear another call to service in New York in the summer of 1776, and once again

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commit himself to duty.

During the weeks preceding the eventual fall of New York that summer, General Washington grew increasingly frustrated at the lack of military intelligence available to him, and at the corresponding wealth of information the British seemed to be gathering. In a letter to his commanders, Washington outlined the need for an intelligence network of some sort. "As everything in a way depends on obtaining intelligence of the enemy's movements, leave no stone unturned, nor do not stick at any expense, as I was never more uneasy than on account of my want for knowledge on this score."

Washington's words fell on Hale's ears. Hale wrestled with the decision to become a spy for several days. The role was one of dubious honor in the eyes of many, but Hale overcame the hurdle. Explaining his motives to a friend, who counseled against his decision, he said, "For a year I have been attached to the army, and have not rendered any material service. I wish to be useful, and every kind of service, necessary to the public good, becomes honourable by being necessary. If the exigencies of my country demand a peculiar service, its claims to perform that service are imperious."

Despite this testimony of devotion to his country, Hale would nonetheless be deprived of "rendering any material service." His mission took him across Long Island Sound, to Huntington Bay, where he was to spy on the British. He was detected early, as he made his way across the Sound, and thereafter trailed. He was captured after he had collected some bits of information — before they could be passed on — and brought to Manhattan where he was hung. His career as a spy lasted a total of six days.

A final note about those last words for which Hale is famous. Hale appeared to have been quoting from Cato, speaking as he views his dead son, Marcus.

How beautiful is death when earned by virtue. Who would not be that youth? What pity it is that we can die but once to serve our country. ✣

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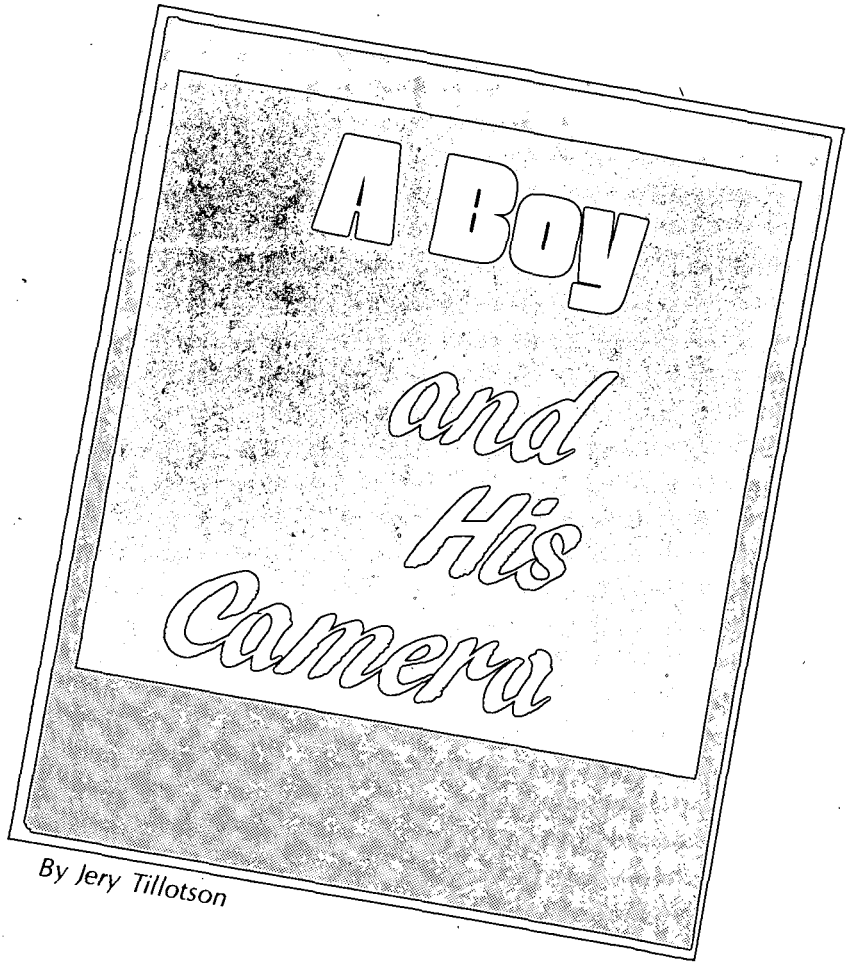

By Jery Tillotson

It was a week since Harry Rogers had assigned his precocious students the topic for their semester project: *My Family.*

They were to use their proven talents in any way they chose, to interpret their feelings about their families. Cindy James was already working on a ballet that centered around her widowed mom and two younger sisters. Clarence Pigeon, a musical prodigy, was composing a *mini rock opera* describing life with his two computer expert parents.

Everyone in the Advanced Arts Class was working their socks off to triumph over all others to win the approval of their charming instructor. Everybody except Tommy Roebuck. Like all students at the Hallmark Private Academy, his I.Q. was genius level. At twelve, he already displayed signs of becoming an extraordinary photographer. What he could do

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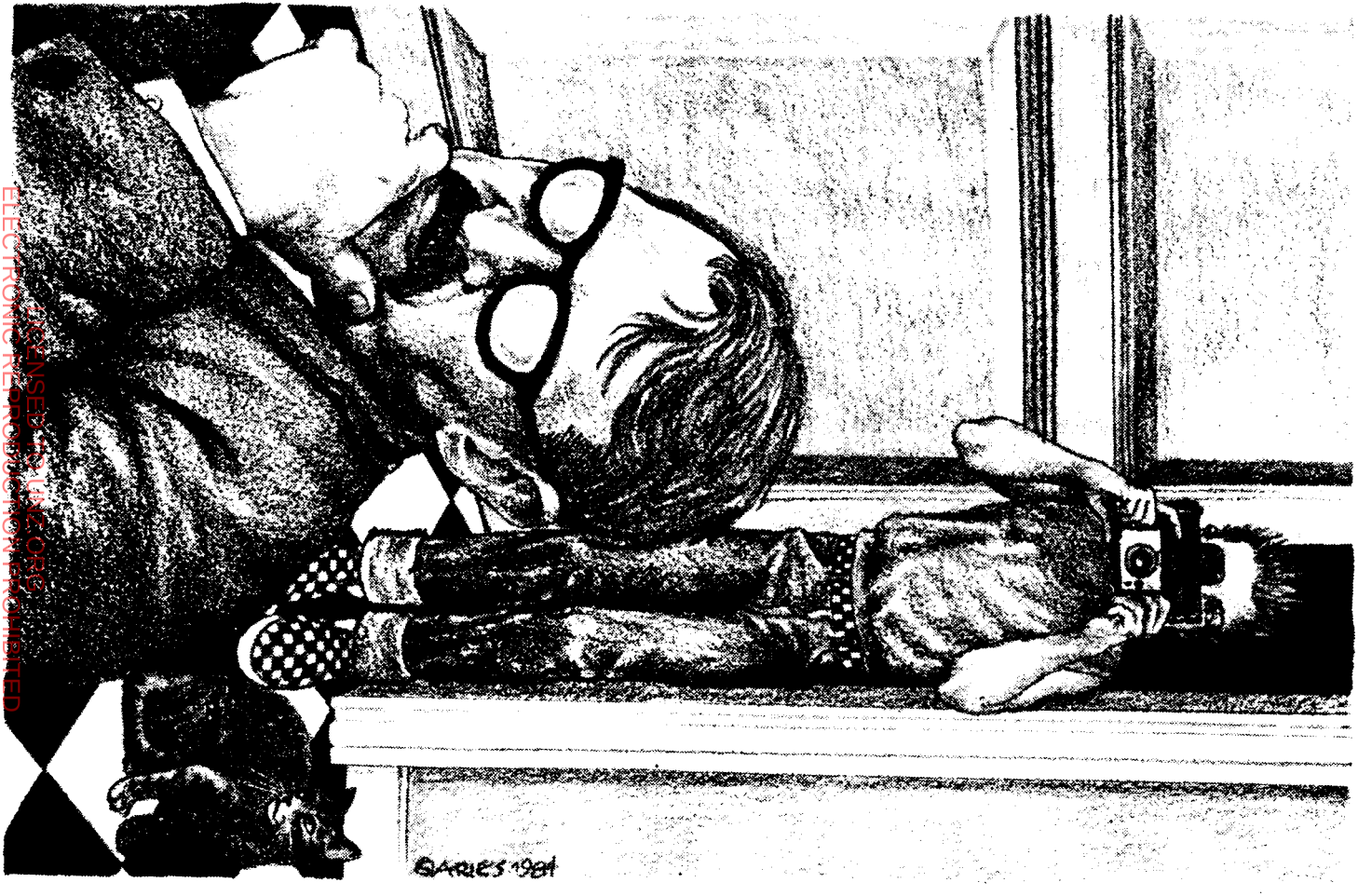

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with a simple Polaroid camera was uncanny; he had won second place in the *Washington Post's* Amateur Photographer Contest last year, submitting a picture of his cat, Tiger, preparing to attack an unsuspecting robin.

But Tommy was not doing anything on his project and did not show any signs of being in preparation. His work area was a jumble of books and posters of rock stars and there were no indications of creative endeavor. When the bell rang that afternoon, the teacher asked Tommy to stay behind.

Harry leaned back in his chair and put his hands behind his head. "Hey, buddy, what's wrong, huh? Something bugging you? Come on, Tommy, you can tell me. I'm your friend."

Just as the teacher was handsome, witty, articulate and beloved by students and faculty, Tommy was thin, frail, and anonymous though his red hair was slicked up into greasy spikes in a brave attempt to look "punk." That was the big look at Hallmark: New Wave, Punk, Tough. Not yet teenagers, they startled even the sophisticated Harry Rogers when he overheard parts of their chatter. It was always about sex, drugs, rock, and videos.

Now, the student's mouth tightened as he studied the teacher's manicured nails. His own were bitten to the quick. "It's my dad. He . . . we . . . don't hit it off so good. He won't let me do anything I really want to do."

Harry leaned forward. His face was warm with compassion. "And what's that, Tommy?"

Eagerly, the boy poured out his complaints. Dr. Orville Roebuck would not permit his son to eat candy or cookies or Big Macs — or drink Cokes. Worse still, the scientist would not allow a television set inside the Roebuck household. Television caused brain rot, he said. He didn't mind a radio or a record player. But not a boob tube.

Tommy's eyes watered as he added with a sigh: "I can't even watch the rock videos. That's where all the kids have gone now; to somebody's house to watch the *Top 40 Videos.* They come on every day at five."

"Look," began Harry Rogers. "I'm really sorry to hear all this, Tommy. I understand what you're going through, buddy, but you can't let that stop you from working on your project. You're a wonderful photographer. That's why I let you into my class. A lot of kids would give their eyeteeth to be where you are . . . but you've not done anything. All you need to do is push a button and, snap, you've got a picture of your family."

"Mom's dead. Died a year ago of cancer."

"Sorry, I forgot. Then get pictures of your father. He has an office at home, doesn't he? Tommy, we want a creative record of your family life. Your father, your cat, your . . . "

"Dad's a twerp!" His snort was an

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heroic attempt to sound tough. It didn't quite come off.

Harry Rogers was genuinely amazed at this statement. "Tommy! Your father's a famous scientist. He helped get the space shuttle off the ground."

The boy pushed the tip of his Adidas covered foot against the desk. "Him and those old rockets. That's all he does. Work on space ships. And now there's that new space thing and . . . oops!" Tommy covered his mouth. His eyes widened in fright. "You won't tell anybody I said that, will you? That's *real* confidential! Nobody's supposed to know anything about it."

Harry smiled. "Calm down, buddy. I won't say anything. But I . . . I thought he'd retired from NASA. Seems like I read something about him leaving the space project last year."

Tommy shrugged his narrow shoulders. He seemed relieved the teacher had taken it so lightly. "Yeah. Guess so. I can't say anything about that. It's confidential."

He was looking at the big Sony color TV set over in the corner. Mr. Rogers kept it so his class could watch special events, like the attempted assassination of President Reagan, or a special session of Congress. Sometimes, he showed his pupils *Our Gang* comedies. It was a fascinating sociological comparison: the Depression kids of the Thirties, with their ideas of fun, versus those of today, steeped in an ambiance of space travel, terrorism and pop culture.

Watching him, the teacher made a decision. "Okay, I'll tell you what. We'll make a deal. It's nearly five. You can watch the *Top 40 Videos,* if — and I repeat, if — you bring in some pictures tomorrow of your home life. Since it's just you and your father, show him at work."

Tommy was hurrying over to the set. "Yeah, okay, I'll do it, but let's get to the videos. Michael Jackson's supposed to be on today."

The Polaroid shots Tommy brought in the next day were superb. Harry Rogers studied them intently after Tommy had taped them into his project scrapbook. In one, a big tabby cat snoozed on a window sill. In another, a husky looking man, probably in his late thirties, sat slumped in his chair before a large desk. In the background was a huge map of the world. The composition of the setting and the lighting were excellent.

"Daddy didn't want me to shoot him at his desk," Tommy grinned. "Says he's working on something really top secret like I said. He didn't know I got this. He likes to drink a lot after supper."

The art instructor expressed great concern. "Good Lord, Tommy, we don't want your father getting mad at us. Of course you don't want to photograph anything highly classified. He might be working on a new space craft or satellite or a

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time machine or a flying saucer. Who knows?

"Still . . . wouldn't it be wonderful to look back from some future date and trace a whole year of one's life through a particular work project?" His father would be proud of him, the teacher pointed out.

The boy's face looked unusually old in the fading light of the classroom. "He's always mad at me. 'Tommy do this. Tommy do that,' " he mimicked. "He's mean a lot of times, too; not funny and nice like you are. Always correcting me . . . I wish I was grown-up; boy I'd show him! Boy I'd sure like to get even with him."

Harry Rogers sighed and lit a cigarette. He recalled "Family Night," which Hallmark School held at the beginning of the school year. It gave the faculty a chance to meet the parents of all their bright, young charges, some of whom would go on to make names for themselves. A sizable portion would vanish into suburbia, of course, never to display brilliance again, and a smaller group would end up drug addicts, alcoholics and suicides. Being a genius didn't necessarily equip one for the realities of life.

Sociability was not one of Dr. Roebuck's strong points. Extremely shy, sweating profusely, his sensitive dark eyes peered out through thick, black-rimmed glasses, never leaving his equally ill-at-ease son. "Shake hands with Mr. Rogers, son . . . don't act like a block of wood . . . say thank you for the compliment . . . Tommy's in one of his bad moods, ha, ha, ha . . . you'll have to excuse him."

"How . . . if you could, how would you get even with him, Tommy?" the teacher asked quietly. "Uh oh, if you're thinking of trying to sneak into his confidential files, you'd better forget it. You aren't the Hardy Boys, you know. Try it and you'd really get our you-know-whats in a sling."

Tommy laughed. It changed his whole appearance. Suddenly, he looked very boyish, impish, likable. "Can I catch the videos, now?" he asked. His instructor eagerly gave his permission.

While "Culture Club" was on, Harry slipped the boy a Snickers candy bar and a Coke. Before he left, Tommy again adopted a tough guy swagger. He even pulled up the collar of his denim jacket. "Dad's always telling me I've got a lot to learn. I'm really gonna surprise him."

Choosing his words carefully, the young teacher spoke into the phone that night. He informed his New York contact that the first entré had been made into the group. He had actual photographs of a *friend* at home – which didn't show much – "but it's a start."

Infiltrating the "Brainy Dozen" – a group of twelve brilliant aeronautical scientists – had become an obsession for foreign agents like Harry Rogers. These men

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were responsible for the spectacular success of America's space shuttle, *The Columbia*. Strong evidence and intense rumor indicated that the Brainy Dozen were embarked on an even more ambitious project: the creation of a super satellite, a Flash Gordon type vehicle that would actually be an arsenal of missiles, laser beam driven cannons and other incredible weapons that were reminiscent of the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* movies.

Dr. Orville Roebuck was a key member of the Brainy Dozen. It was strongly believed that he was the spark plug of the whole group.

As a school boy in England, Harry Rogers had been obsessed with growing up and becoming the socialistic James Bond – fighting the good fight against the capitalistic evils of the West. At Oxford, he had quickly discovered and become part of a passionate band of young communists, several of whom went into espionage work in highly public jobs, becoming teachers, journalists and tour guides.

Harry was fascinated by the dual careers of his old cronies, who managed to live very well on secrets stolen from the United States and paid for by the communists. He often toyed with the idea of becoming a "spy," but it wasn't until he was teaching school in Washington D.C. that it became feasible. He was urged by some of his old school chums to try to infiltrate the Brainy Dozen (through Dr. Roebuck), contacted chiefly because he had become an extremely popular teacher. It was time for him to stop being a theorist, he was told, and to put his convictions into practice.

There was shrewd logic at work here. Of all the members of the Brainy Dozen, Orville Roebuck was considered the most vulnerable. He was a desperately lonely man who had never recovered from the death of his wife. Consequently, he had shut himself off from Tommy, as well. Only he, his son, a cat, and a part-time housekeeper lived in their one-story house on the outskirts of Washington.

The portrait painted of the vulnerable Dr. Roebuck showed the following: he was a fiend for work, preferring to do most of his work in the office he'd built at home, despite admonitions from his superiors, and he was a tyrant. He wanted things done his way – God help those who refused to toe the line!

Harry Rogers used his considerable charm and genuine teaching record to secure a position in the small progressive school where Tommy Roebuck was enrolled. The position had become available as the result of a tragic car accident in which the young woman who had previously taught the Advanced Arts class had perished.

Harry was wonderful with children and quickly became an asset to the school.

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The Hallmark Private School encouraged a strong interaction between faculty and parents: to reach the students, one needed to know their progenitors. Rarely a week passed that first autumn that Harry Rogers was not invited to dinner at the residence of a student. He was a favorite with all of them. The elegant blond man flirted harmlessly with the mothers, and the fathers were flattered to find someone who hung on to their every word. He made everyone feel good and his easy laugh could always lighten even the dullest of occasions without causing offense.

For obvious reasons, he was sincerely thrilled when Tommy invited him home for dinner. It was one month after the Advanced Arts class had begun and two weeks after Tommy had begun taking photographs of the Roebuck "home life." Harry had deepened his relationship with his student by spending time with him; talking, listening, sharing his increased fondness for video taped music and junk food, both of them gaining a pound or two.

It was painfully obvious that night that both father and son were on their best behavior for Harry Rogers. Tommy's usually hideous spikes of greased hair looked less jagged than expected and he wore a white shirt and a black tie. His father, while extremely bashful, did try to make small talk, although Harry was quick to note that his host gulped down several gin and tonics before their meal and drank nearly a bottle of wine before dinner was completed. Afterwards, he consumed two more gin drinks.

Harry was delighted. The drunker Dr. Roebuck became, the easier it would be to assess what was really going on here at home – and to learn, perhaps, if the scientist really was working on a project that had agents everywhere abuzz.

Harry outdid himself, telling stories and anecdotes, causing even their nervous faces to break out into grins and then into laughs. Then after eating, when father and son gave their lively visitor a brief tour of the house and they came to the study, Harry Rogers paused in the doorway, closed his eyes in mock concentration, and said, "Aha! Here I can sense the heartbeat of the household; the secret chamber of Dr. Orville Roebuck."

This was exactly the right thing to say. His host smiled dryly and Tommy grinned, and the three of them entered the cluttered cubicle. Tommy sat down on the floor and began tracing a piece of twine in a circle. His big tabby cat, Tiger, jumped and whirled in an attempt to catch it. The men sat at the large, cluttered desk, next to pictures on the wall of Dr. Roebuck and others wildly whooping and laughing and drinking from bottles of champagne. His host explained that this was the occasion of the successful landing of *The Columbia* after its first mission.

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A second photograph showed the triumphant astronauts hugging Orville Roebuck, who was surrounded by several other scholarly looking men. Harry counted them. Eleven. The Brainy Dozen. Roebuck was in the center and was making a "V" for victory sign.

"You were really young when you retired from the space program," Harry said, bluntly. The alcohol he'd drunk had loosened his tongue more than usual, but he sensed he was saying the right thing.

Orville Roebuck looked away from him and studied a row of files against the wall. His words were thick when he spoke: "True, true. Pressure's terrible. Everybody thinks you've got it made when you sit behind a desk like this and just doodle and draw things and write things down. But it takes so damned much out of your brain . . . I'm doing consulting work now. Lots easier. Money's good."

Liar, thought the guest, but he smiled and nodded his head in understanding. Tommy lay on his back with the cat stretched across his chest. The boy was either off in another world or concentrating on their conversation. It was hard to tell which. This was a dead place to grow up in, Harry thought. And no television.

An old grandfather clock in the hallway struck nine. Dr. Roebuck looked down at Tommy, as if he'd just realized he was in the room.

"Tommy, off to bed now. And brush your teeth. And don't try reading under the quilts. You go to sleep."

Tommy looked shocked. "Dad, tomorrow's Saturday! Mr. Rogers is here! Gimme a break!"

Harry thought the man really overreacted when his face turned purple and he bellowed out: "I said go to bed! Now, move ass, son!"

The visitor was startled by this extreme change of mood, but he was joyous, too. Tommy would be a pushover. Who wouldn't want to get even with such a damned old sourpuss.

Bunching up his mouth into a furious moué, Tommy skulked out of the room. Within seconds, a door slammed somewhere down the hall. Enraged by this, the father lurched out of his chair and half staggered out of the room. "That boy's gonna get it," he slurred.

The minute he was gone, Harry Rogers went into action. He lifted the files and newspapers that lay strewn on the desk. Beneath them was a sight that both stunned and exhilarated him: blueprints of a space craft amid myriad tightly written comments and formulas. When Dr. Roebuck re-entered the room several minutes later, however, he found the teacher studying the photographs on the wall and sipping his drink. He was humming and appeared to be thoroughly enjoying himself.

"Hate to say it, Mr. Rogers," the father muttered, "but that boy of

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mine is gonna be one hell of a problem someday."

Days later, the "problem" was sitting on the edge of the teacher's desk. The classroom was otherwise empty although signs of creative endeavor were everywhere. A clay world composed of one student's parents, even brothers and sisters, reached toward the ceiling, and Cindy James' ballet backdrop was propped against a wall. Metal figures and paintings were stacked or resting on available surfaces.

Tommy was guzzling a Coke and gobbling down a Snickers candy bar — courtesy of his teacher. Harry Rogers was studying the new Polaroid shots Tommy had brought in that morning: Tiger was shown jumping into the air to catch a scarlet leaf, the housekeeper sliced potatoes into a big pot on the stove, and Dr. Roebuck stood with his back to the camera. He was looking at a group of symbols he'd written on his blackboard. Harry complimented his student, and noted a quick flash of shrewdness, of cunning, flicker in the boy's eyes. It was so unusual, so brief that Harry wondered if he had actually seen it.

"Dad didn't hear me take this one. He likes to play his records full blast sometimes. Listens to a lot of Bach."

Harry pretended to be interested in a pile of paper clips near his hand. "Tommy, you know you really haven't gotten your Dad doing what he does best. He's supposed to be a scientist. Make him look like one." Tommy looked at him sharply. "I mean . . . I mean, get him bending over some files, get him to spread them out on the desk. I don't mean anything Top Secret or confidential but . . . "

"I read 'em sometimes," Tommy said quietly. His grin was cocky and proud. He wiped his chocolate-stained fingers on his blue jeans and threw the wrapper into the trash can.

"You . . . you what, Tommy?"

Tommy dug for a morsel of candy caught somewhere in his right cheek. "I know how to get 'em. He hides the keys in secret places but me and Tiger, we know where they are."

Harry shook his head and acted flabbergasted — which he was. "Tommy, I'm sorry but I simply can't believe you. Those are top secret documents; I'm sure. No one can see those."

The boy's face tightened. "I'll show you. I'll take a picture of them and . . . "

Harry Rodgers closed his eyes tight. "No. You'll do nothing of the kind. I'll give you something else to do, Tommy. I thought you could handle this assignment but I really don't think you can. You fantasize too much. Nobody can do what you just said you could do." Harry scolded the boy — and held his breath!

The next day, Tommy came up to him after class, hands full. Harry

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glanced at new Polaroid shots he'd brought in and then put them into Tommy's project file. "Very good, Tommy. They look fine. I'll look at them more closely when I have a few minutes. You know, you're making the best progress of anybody in the class."

Tommy didn't seem interested in this compliment. He was already moving toward the television set. "Can I watch *Top 40 Videos* now?"

"Of course, buddy, of course!" Harry cried. "And I'll slip you a Coke and candy bar if you promise you won't tell on me."

"It's a deal."

Harry's contact in New York, at Harry's urging, flew into Washington that night. He was dumbfounded by all that the novice agent had achieved. Among the Poloroid pictures presented to him was one that showed a metal file bearing the words: TOP SECRET. Another showed a diagram of a space vehicle. And a third was the picture of Dr. Roebuck's blackboard covered with mathematical symbols, partially blocked by his body.

The pictures didn't show much detail, yet they proved beyond a doubt that the scientist was working on something new. It was a breakthrough. Harry explained to his contact that it would be simple to get into the house and go through Dr. Roebuck's files . . . if necessary. With a little encouragement, the man's own son might help.

Tommy aimed his camera at the documents spread across the top of his father's desk, pausing to shift the lamp so that the light would reveal everything. There were drawings of a space engine, and there were specific explanations on how to get the craft into outer space. The youthful photographer pushed the button on his Polaroid. A square of glossy, thick paper slid out.

He turned and gave the photograph to his father, who stood behind him, along with two other men. One was dressed as a deliveryman and the other as a janitor. "Okay?" Tommy asked.

Orville Roebuck studied it for a minute. Then he smiled and stooped down to give his son a big hug. "It's great, Marlon Brando. Now go into the kitchen and check the fridge. I got *you* a little surprise. You've earned it."

After he left, the trio of men poured coffee and sat around the desk. The deliveryman, a husky Panamanian, pulled out a small notebook. "Harry's planning to pass this picture to Misha tomorrow night, after he gets it from Tommy. Central Park, New York. We'll be there. We'll get them both.

"Good thing you recognized Harry from Oxford, Orv, and remembered him so well. We'd never have been able to anticipate him, otherwise, and we'd have missed out on this particular little group altogether. Thanks." →

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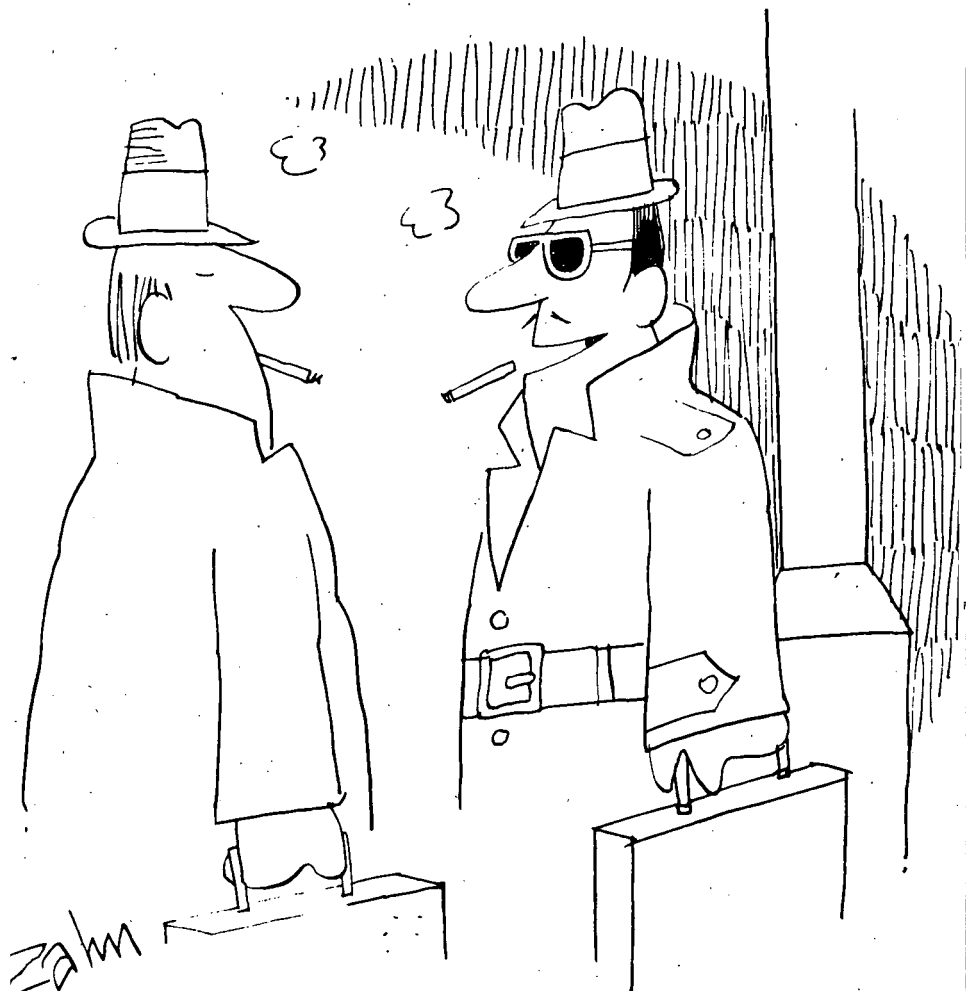

"YOU'RE IN LUCK, I'M HAVING A SALE THIS WEEK... TWO SECRETS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE."

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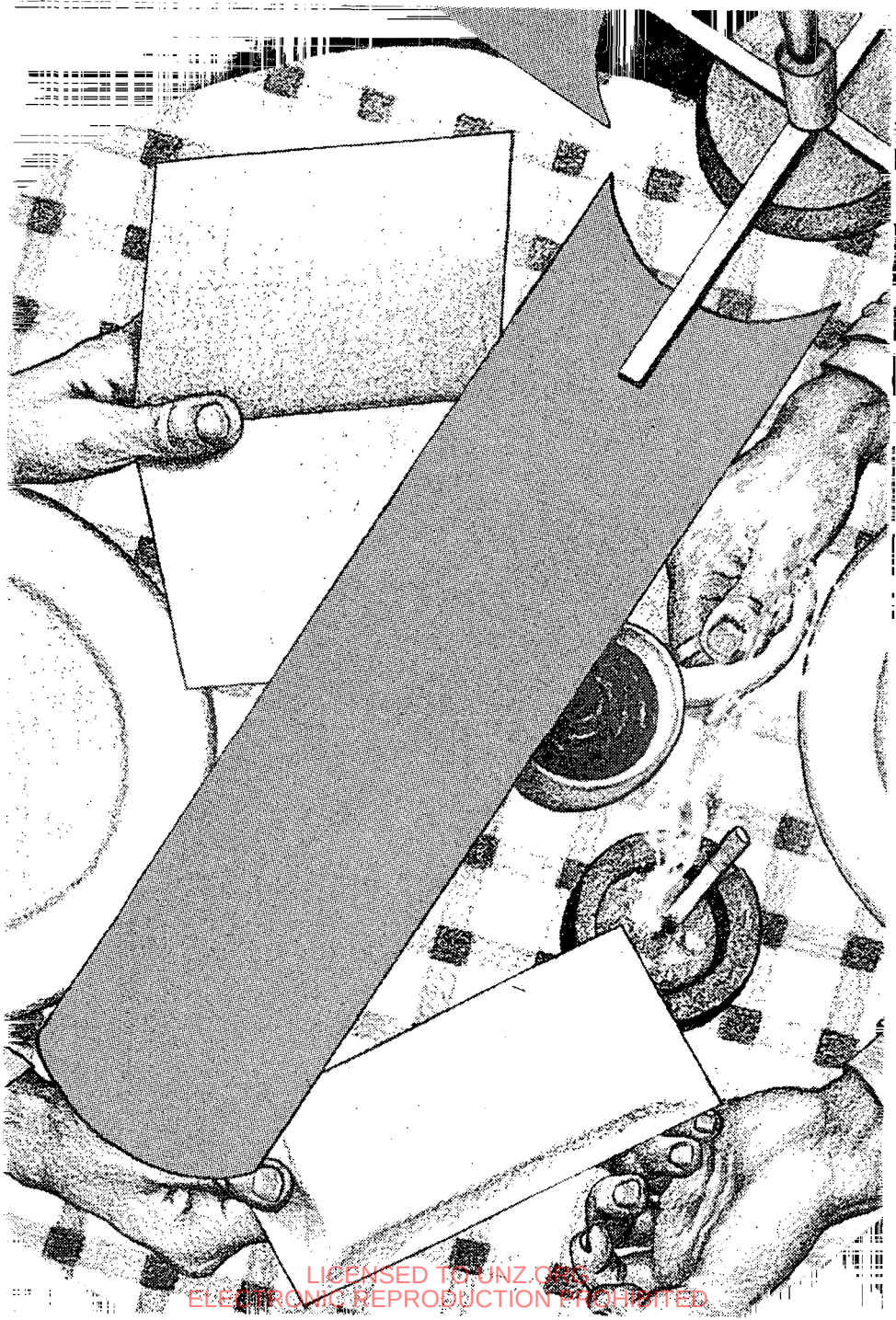

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Breakfast At The Kawnbawza

by Isak Romun

Hal Stevens strode across the dining hall of the Kawnbawza Hotel and stopped at a table at which sat a diminutive, moist-eyed figure daintily picking at a breakfast herring.

"You did it, Travinside, you did it! All Rangoon is agog," Stevens exclaimed, wringing the diner's hand. "But how?"

Jeffrey Travinside withdrew his hand and pointed one of its fingers at his right temple, signifying that the secret was locked in his head and would jolly well stay there. His other hand he extended, palm up, toward Stevens.

Stevens placed a fat sealed envelope in the outstretched hand. "You'll count it?"

"Do I ever?" Travinside replied, smoothly tucking the envelope away in an inner pocket of his blazer. "You know how I trust you. Besides, you Yanks seldom stint on the money. You have so much of it. Some

Illustration by Aries

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refreshment? I *don't* recommend the fish. It seems to have come from the murkiest depths of the Irrawaddy and still has a good bit of the murk about it."

"Coffee and toast," Stevens ordered briskly of the fezzed waiter who had silently materialized at his elbow. The waiter bowed, murmured "Sahib," and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

"You *are* amazing, Travinside," Stevens said, redirecting attention to his table companion. "We thought you had failed us. When our man at the airport saw Abel Bakerov getting on the special Moscow-bound job with that overstuffed attache case, we thought the game was up. You know what was in that case, what it could have done to us if it had gotten to the Kremlin? And then..."

"And then?" Travinside sighed, wearily, as he extracted a Service Special from a circular can placed on the table for his exclusive use by Singh, the waiter. After lighting the cigarette, he repeated, "And then?"

"And then, poof!" Stevens said. "Well, not *poof;* it wasn't an explosion, was it? *Was it?"* he asked the smiling, weary, inscrutable face of his table mate. "Okay, so don't say. No matter. Their best bomb men went over that plane before Bakerov boarded. It couldn't have been a bomb. So you tinkered with the engine. Is that it?"

"Engines puzzle me," Travinside answered. "All those wires, all those parts, all that black stickiness. Ugh!"

"It's enough that you brought it off. Though we'd pay handsomely to know how. Just for the report, of course, and for possible future use. But not in an area where we'd be competing with you," the American hurriedly assured.

"What is handsome, Stevens?"

"Your fee, half again."

"Umm. Well, perhaps. But here's Singh with your order."

The waiter slid up to the table and, taking care not to rattle cup against saucer, placed these items before Stevens. He followed with a carafe of coffee and a plate holding two slices of lightly browned bread, each with a glistening golden surface. Singh maneuvered sugar bowl and cream jug to within Stevens' reach, then poured the coffee, after which he withdrew a short distance to await the further pleasure of either diner.

Stevens creamed and sweetened his coffee but, instead of eating right away, opted to talk further of the "accident" that had happened earlier that morning to one of Moscow's most valued agents. It had been an unusual event. The plane appeared wobbly on takeoff but managed to get into the air though it was still noticeably unstable. About fifty feet off the ground, the aircraft lost its battle with itself, turned turtle, and crashed to the concrete runway. There were no survivors, and Bakerov's hefty attache case and its

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contents were effectively incinerated.

At the end of his recounting, the American addressed himself to his toast. He picked up a piece, dunked it gingerly and quickly in his coffee, and had it enroute to his mouth before his hand stopped in its passage and his nose crinkled in a quivering rosette of distaste. "Singh!" he called.

"Sahib?"

"This is oleo you have on the toast. Where's the butter? You know I have to have butter. Oleo spoils the taste of the coffee after dunking. I hate oleo!"

"Ah, sah'b Stevens," Singh mumbled placatingly, "we have no butter. Some thief in night break into kitchen and abscond with butter, only butter. We have scoured shops and the bazaar and no butter is to hand; only margarine, which we purchased."

"Phooey!" Stevens said, and in his haste to disengage himself from the offending substitute let the toast drop from his hand. It fell to the floor, margarine side down. Singh busied himself cleaning up.

Travinside had watched with interest the contretemps between American and Indian and when the toast fell, he bent down quickly, his head below the table surface, his eyes intently fixed on the fallen bread.

"So," he mused, "margarine is just as effective."

Stevens also was watching Singh removing toast and stain from the floor. "Ever notice," he reflected, "how toast always lands spread-side down when you drop it? Very messy. If it were the other side you could kiss it up to God and eat away."

"See here, Stevens," Travinside said quickly, as Singh withdrew, "I'll sell you my secret, how I destroyed that plane. There. I've taken you up on your offer now. You have to pay me even if you guess my secret."

Stevens glanced at the spot on the floor where the fallen toast had lain. "You slippery devil! Did you...?"

"Slippery is the *mot juste*. Yes, all over the top."

"Fantastic."

"Will I see you at lunch? We'll start with a *hinchon*, a rather nice clear soup with a joint of oxtail in its middle. Somewhat like a Japanese waterscape with island. Then, in memory of our departed colleague, there will be chicken kiev and a borscht which, given the circumstances of the Kawnbawza kitchen, will be as good as it should be. Cook has assured me, his store of butter will be replenished from Pegu in time for the midday meal's preparation. Do you fancy Mandalay Ale? No matter, it's the only kind they have here. Pale or dark? Food and drink are my treat."

"You say," muttered Stevens, making a mental note to bring another sealed envelope with him at noon. ⊣

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ABOUT BOOKS

"A Spy in Winter", by Michael Hastings (Macmillan Publishing Company $14.95), satisfies. This fast-moving, fast-reading novel involves the sympathies of the reader early on, and is so consistently a whole that these sympathies never waver. The characters are well-drawn, particularly that of the "hero," Alex Orloff, a Russian-born, Western-bred agent, who is the fictional identity of the master agent who recruited, directed and controlled the Western world's most notorious traitors, including Kim Philby.

While one questions one's choice of a bad guy serving as hero, one roots for him nonetheless. I liked "A Spy in Winter", although I have one beef with the author: Halfway through the book, I guessed that the real bad guy had to be one of two particular characters — I hate figuring out "who done it" — and that somewhat spoiled the remainder of the book for me, as I was unable to resist testing each action thereafter to gain evidence for my guess. (I was half right.) Now, others enjoy reading a novel in this way; for them, this, about which I complain, is definitely not a defect.

All in all, this is one book avid spy readers will enjoy.

"The Cold War File", by Andy East (The Scarecrow Press, Inc. $22.50), is a delightful resource material — not a novel — in which one finds an evaluative guide to over sixty television, movie and novel espionage series of the sixties, including information on well-known fictional spies such as George Smiley, Quiller, Matt Helm, Modesty Blaise, and a wealth of others. This book is must reading for serious students of contemporary spy thrillers.

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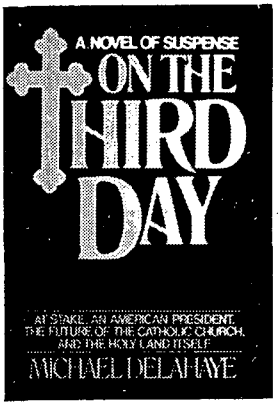
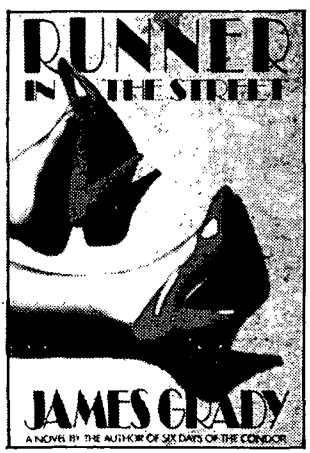

A NOVEL OF SUSPENSE
ON THE
THIRD
DAY
AT STAKE: AN AMERICAN PRESIDENT, THE FUTURE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND THE HOLY LAND ITSELF
MICHAEL DELAHAYE

"On The Third Day", by Michael Delahaye (Macmillan Publishing Company, $15.95), is a novel that those readers who are interested in the "Jesus" genre should not miss. All others, take note: While the action is fast-moving, this novel is not fast-reading; there are too many loyalties involved, and quite often one must go back to check on who's who and who is with which group. And it is impossible to root for any one man or group; each of them — the CIA, the Roman Catholic Church, Israel, the Israeli spy organization, the Palestinians, the American Government — has at least one hero and one anti-hero within its ranks. For instance, Kesler, the character most obviously deserving of the reader's sympathy, is allowed to fall by the wayside, as an important character in the novel, thereby causing the reader's emotional attachment to him to peter out into nothing. Very unsatisfactory.

Otherwise . . . the interplay of the groups, their actions, reactions and counter-actions, is fast-paced and very interest-holding. The use of minor characters as catalysts is different, and works well. Everything fits together without being overdone or becoming tedious. (It should be obvious that I would have loved this book if I could have become involved with at least one of the characters, from beginning to end — I do like Jesus-genre books!)



Then there's "Runner In The Street", a mystery by James Grady (who also wrote "Six Days of The Condor") (Macmillan Publishing Company, $14.95). Buried somewhere within the pages of this book is a storyline, a good storyline, but one so overwhelmed by the author's need to philosophize — he pontificates on society, love, rock music, pimps, prostitutes, and drugs, among other subjects — that halfway through this novel, any mystery reader worth his salt will say "To hell with it; it's not worth the effort."

Reading this book is work, and it

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shouldn't be. The idea is a good one, and the author has a wonderful way with words; he simply seems unable to make up his mind about which book he's writing: a mystery, a love story, a sociological tract on street-living. The book jacket says: "How Rankin (the book's private investigator hero) resolves the mysteries of his life — the professional and the personal — is the core of this unusual detective novel that serves up more than the standard fare." Yeah. And, mystery/detective reader that I am, I say, "Who cares?"

Finally, there's "Russian Spring", by Dennis Jones (Beaufort Books, Inc., $15.95). I found this political thriller beautifully written — I'd love to read other books by Jones, he has such an enormous talent for using the language — but not my own personal cup of tea. For me, the military/political arena, in which all the action takes place, is boring. I couldn't make myself care about the details of the Soviet military action in Afghanistan, nor the maneuvers of the army officers as they vied for position both within the military organization and out among the leaders of their country.

And when I found human beings to interest me, to cause me to care about them as people, well . . . the author refused to cooperate. Too often he mired them in so much detail that I found myself wishing I could be finished with them! Finally, ultimately, and most unusually for me, I closed the book without finishing it. A peek at the last page — something I would never do if I planned to continue reading —showed me that I was right!

This book is good for the espionage reader who likes his daily war messages as they are printed in the New York Times, et al, but not for those of us who prefer to either live without the news — distressing as it always is — or who deal with it when we can have it served up to us by the reassuring voices of dulcet-toned radio announcers. This is a book for the hard-core espionage/military/political fan. I leave him/her to it.

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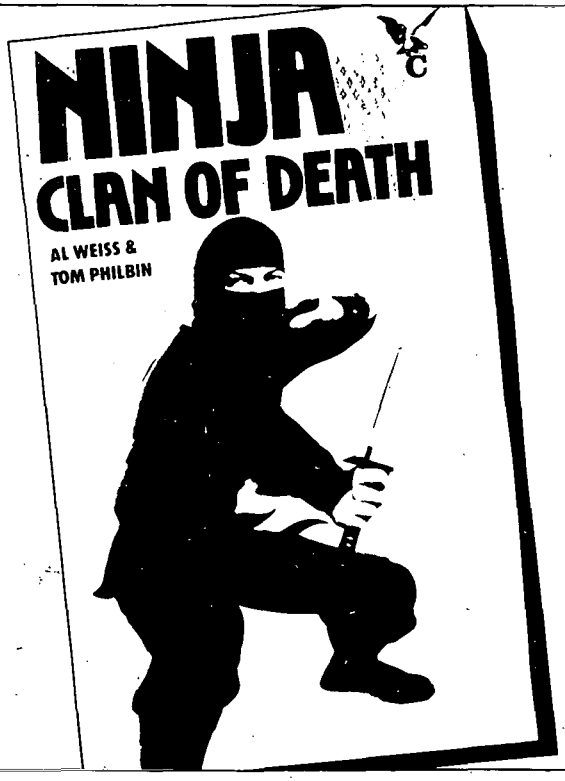

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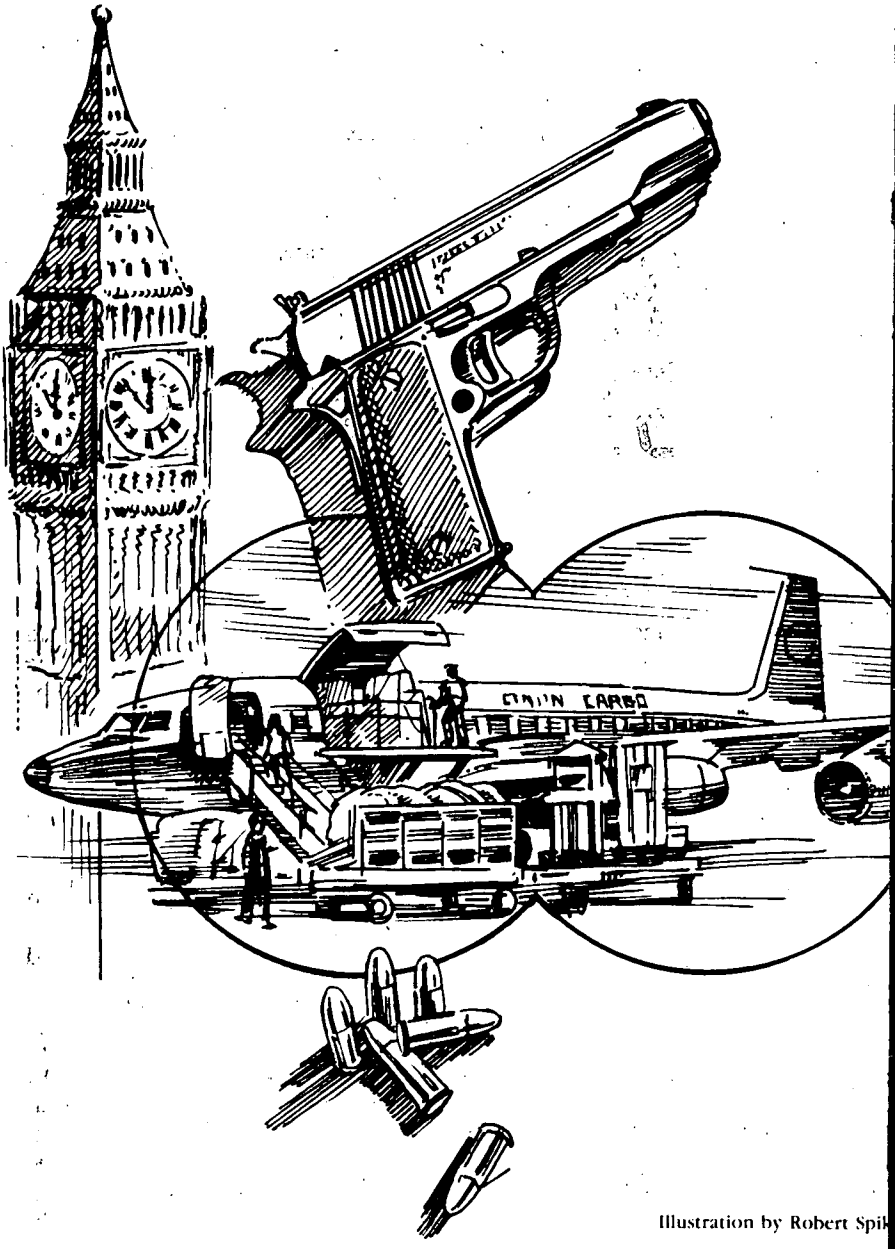

Illustration by Robert Spi

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THE HATCHTREE ASSIGNMENT

by Edward D. Hoch

Charles Spacer hurried across the Liffey Bridge and walked quickly toward his hotel on Abbey Street. The afternoon sky was low and silvery gray, not unusual for Dublin in May. He'd been in the city for three days and hadn't seen the sun yet. When Colman King telephoned from London he'd asked about the weather, but Spacer had only grunted.

Now King was waiting in the lobby of his hotel, seated so his face was hidden from the door by a large potted fern. Spacer walked past him to the elevator without looking in either direction. He'd been in his sixth-floor room about five minutes when Colman King rapped gently on the door.

As he walked in, the older man motioned toward the walls and ceiling. "No bugs," Spacer assured him. "I swept it."

"Can't be too careful, even in a Dublin hotel room."

"What's on your mind, Colman?" The man from Washington never contacted him unless there was a problem — an assignment, as he liked to put it. Otherwise, Charles Spacer was the European sales manager for Conco International, a successful American electronics firm with offices in major cities of the world. At times, Spacer had trouble deciding which of his two lives was the real one and which merely a cover identity. His wife back in Oak Park, Illinois, had had the same problem. Last year, when they'd both

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turned forty, she'd suggested there was little point in keeping up the charade of a marriage when his life was centered in Europe and hers was in America.

"Ever hear of the Hatchtree?" Colman King asked.

"High-capacity computer, the best there is, according to the electronics magazines. What about it?"

"As you may know, it's on the export embargo list at the State Department. It can be sold to friendly nations but not to the Soviets or Eastern Bloc countries. It could have a military application in missile launchings."

"And you think some of them are sneaking out?" Reading King's mind had never been difficult.

"Exactly. Two have been sold to a machine-tool company here in Dublin. They're the latest model — the Hatchtree 66 — with far more capacity and sophistication than such a firm could possibly need."

"When are they due here?"

"They leave Kennedy tonight on board a chartered cargo plane. It lands in Dublin at seven tomorrow morning. The Hatchtree Company is shipping to Brannister Limited in Dublin, but I'm willing to bet those computers will be loaded onto another plane right at the airport. If so, we can have them seized by Customs."

"I'll do what I can," Spacer promised. "It seems fairly routine."

"Maybe not. There could be a joker in the deck."

"Oh?"

"Brannister may be using its profits from the transshipment to purchase arms for the IRA."

Spacer nodded. "I'll watch my step. How can I reach you if needed?"

Colman King passed over an envelope. "Here's everything you need — background on the Hatchtree, including size and description of the shipping containers, my contacts here in Dublin, and a cash advance in Irish pounds to cover expenses. My contacts will hold for forty-eight hours. Then I'll be gone."

They shook hands and Colman King departed.

Brannister Limited maintained a four-story factory and offices in the northeast section of the city, near Fairview Park. It was an area where elderly row houses were gradually giving way to new developments. Charles Spacer had

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seen these areas, and firms like Brannister, all his life. The only unusual thing was that Brannister had paid two-and-a-quarter million dollars into a New York bank account for some of the most highly developed computer equipment in existence today. Riding up to the top-floor offices in the rickety elevator cage, open on all sides, Spacer could agree with Colman King that there was reason for suspicion.

Only one member of the Brannister clan was still active in the business. Daniel Brannister was around fifty, with a puffy red face that hinted at too much drink, and a damp handshake that did nothing to rebuild his image. "Charles Spacer of Conco International?" he asked, studying the business card. "Have we done business with you?"

"Not yet, but I hope to remedy that," Spacer said with a smile.

"It's late in the afternoon, Mr. Spacer," he said, speaking in an accent that seemed part Irish and part English. "You caught me just as I was leaving for the day."

"If you could give me just fifteen minutes, I'd like to explain the range of electronic equipment offered by Conco. A company like this could double its output with a few computers and some automated . . ."

"No, no. We're not interested. My grandfather started this business before the Easter Rising, and we've made a go of it through three generations by following a fixed path. I've seen plenty of other firms wander off into automation and end up with unhappy workers and a declining share of the market."

"Well, Mr. Brannister, I could cite case histories which prove exactly the opposite."

But he waved the words away. "I really must go. My secretary, Miss O'Casey, can fill you in on our situation here. Maybe you've got a product for us, but I doubt it. Leave your literature with her."

Spacer shook the damp hand again and Daniel Brannister was gone. He waited in his chair for a moment and was joined by a red-haired young woman who'd been at the outside desk. "I'm Maeve O'Casey," she said extending a hand that was firmer than her employer's. "Mr. Brannister is sorry he had to run off, but perhaps I can help."

"I'm sure you can," Spacer said, giving her his best smile. "I can't believe a firm this size hasn't discovered the value of automation and computers."

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Maeve O'Casey opened a file drawer and efficiently yanked out a half-dozen catalogue sheets. "These are our products, Mr. Spacer. Machine tools, plain and simple. To automate this plant would cost more than we could gross in ten years' time, and computers would be no good except for the most basic bookkeeping chores. As it is, we have a service that handles those."

Spacer stuffed the catalogue sheets into his briefcase. "Thank you, anyway. You've brightened my Dublin day a bit."

She glanced out at the leaden sky. "The weather can be a nuisance this time of year, but they're predicting sunny and warmer for tomorrow. How long are you here for?"

"Another two days." He glanced at his watch. "Look, it's almost quitting time. Could I buy you a drink or something?"

She seemed surprised. "Why would you want to do that?"

"Perhaps because Maeve is a nice name."

"A legendary Irish queen. I hate it."

"What about the drink?"

She hesitated, tilting her head slightly, and finally said "Why not?"

They went to a small pub a few blocks away, across the street from a corner park where children played. The bartender called a greeting when they entered, and it was obvious that Maeve O'Casey was a regular customer here. In the subdued lighting of the pub, her face took on a flushed, sensual look. Perhaps it was merely her after-hours appearance, away from the demands of Brannister Limited.

"Do you travel to Dublin often, Mr. Spacer?" she asked.

"Call me Charles. This is only my second trip, but I hope to be here more often in the future."

They small-talked over two pints of beer until she gave him the opening he sought. "Brannister sells its machine tools all over Europe — even behind the Iron Curtain," she told him, lighting a slim English cigarette.

"Is that so? Some firms I call on trade with Poland and Hungry. Sometimes they even buy equipment in America and resell it to Eastern Bloc countries."

"Do they indeed? Isn't that against your American regulations?"

Spacer shrugged. "Depends upon the equipment. Companies are in business to make money. Selling something behind the Iron Curtain is no worse to them than, say, selling guns to the IRA."

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She suddenly stubbed out her cigarette and he realized he'd gone too far. "Did Norman Sentry send you?" she asked, the casual smile gone from her face.

"No — who the hell is Norman Sentry?"

"The best-selling British spy novelist. He lives in Dublin to avoid British taxes and he seems to think he can get the plot for his next book out of me."

"I don't know the man," Spacer answered honestly. "My business doesn't leave time for very much novel reading."

"The man is a pest at times," she said, relenting a bit by directing her anger at the absent Sentry.

"How could you possibly give him the plot for a novel?" Spacer wondered. "Do you have a secret life?"

"No, no" — he was asking questions about the company. Look here, I'm sorry I was angry with you. I'm just in a bad mood today. Forgive me."

"Of course. Want another pint?"

"I'd better not." She gathered up her cigarettes and purse and got to her feet. "It's been a pleasure, Charles. The next time you're in Dublin, I hope you'll stop by the office."

"There's always tomorrow," he reminded her. "If I had your telephone number . . . "

"Tomorrow might be complicated. There's an important shipment coming in. Next time — all right?"

"Fine." He walked her to the door of the pub and watched while she hurried down the street in the direction of the Brannister building. Perhaps she was returning to the office for a bit, but he didn't bother to follow after her.

Instead, he went to the telephone booth and looked up the address of Norman Sentry.

The British author was a man in his thirties, who ushered Spacer into his flat overlooking Mountjoy Square. The place was large and quite luxurious for the neighborhood, with a few original oil paintings taking up any wall space not lined with bookcases. Spacer took in the elaborate word processor and printer on a table against one wall, and breathed in a faint sweetish odor of stale marijuana smoke.

"I don't usually see strangers on the basis of a single telephone call at dinnertime," Norman Sentry said. He was a big, bearded

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man with hairy arms that showed beneath his rolled-up sleeves. The remains of his dinner, apparently eaten alone, were on a sideboard near the kitchen sink, visible from Spacer's chair in the living room.

"And I wouldn't usually bother you after business hours," Spacer assured him. "But my firm, Conco International, is most interested in breaking into the Irish computer market. I understand you've been doing research into this area for a new novel and you might be able to help me."

Sentry's eyes sparkled. "Who told you I was researching computers?"

"Someone at a firm I called on today — Brannister Limited."

"I'll give you a tip — stay away from Brannister. There's no market with them."

"Why is that?" Spacer asked innocently.

"They're interested in other things. Daniel Brannister's father was a fund-raiser for the Irish Republican Army."

"Does Daniel have IRA connections, too?"

"I wouldn't be surprised. In this country those things are in the blood."

"Does he smuggle guns for them? I suppose a machine-tool company would be a good cover."

Norman Sentry snorted. "You sound like a character from one of my novels, Mr. Spacer. How about a drink?"

"Well, maybe just one."

"Scotch?"

"Fine," Spacer hesitated, pretending embarrassment. "I hate to admit I've never read one of your books."

"You didn't miss much. But the public buys them and I have to stay out of jolly old England to keep my money from the inland revenue man. One thing about Ireland — they're very good to writers here."

"So I've heard."

Norman Sentry handed him a glass of Scotch. "So tell me — what did you really come to see me for?"

"I . . . "

"I don't deal in drugs. If someone told you that, they're a liar."

Then what do you deal in? Spacer wondered. *Something besides the printed word, obviously. Perhaps the spoken word.* "I was told you had information."

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"Research?"

"That's right, research. I'd like to pay for some research material."

The Englishman scratched his beard and squinted at him. "On what subject?"

"Hatchtree."

"Well, well — you're in the big leagues, aren't you?"

"No, I simply . . . "

"I know. Look, come back tomorrow evening at this time. I might have something for you."

"How much will it cost me?"

"We'll talk about that after I see what I can get for you. Maybe there'll be nothing. Tomorrow's going to be a busy day."

"So I've heard," Spacer murmured.

In the morning he was up early, just after dawn. He drove his little rented car to the airport, parking in the lot designated for the air cargo terminal. It was some distance from the main passenger terminal, and at this time of the morning there were few cars. Spacer was cautious, hoping not to be seen or recognized by Brannister or his secretary if they put in an appearance.

A big cargo plane touched down a few minutes after seven o'clock and taxied toward Spacer's observation point. Almost at once, he saw Daniel Brannister emerge from a hanger and walk forward to the point where one of the ground crew was motioning the plane to a stop. Soon the pilot and crew emerged from the plane, and through his binoculars Spacer could see some sort of disagreement in progress. All was not going as planned. The pilot walked away and Brannister seemed to be ordering the big plane's cargo hatch opened.

Charles Spacer moved quickly through the cargo terminal, waiting near the door of the customs section through which he knew they all must emerge. The pilot and his blond navigator came out, and then before Spacer realized what was happening he was face to face with Daniel Brannister.

"What . . . what are you doing here?"

"Conco has some air cargo arriving this morning," he said calmly. "Should be in any minute now. You, too?"

"I don't know what I have, except a pack of idiots in my employ!" He shouted at the back of the departing pilot. "Roger,

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just hold it there a minute! The shipment is not on board your aircraft! Your co-pilot, LeRoy, said to see you."

The pilot, Roger, turned with some exasperation and said, "I told you that when we landed. The cargo was off-loaded at Shannon exactly as your office instructed. I have the radio message in my log."

"I'd like to see that," Brannister said, his lips thin and angry. He seemed to have forgotten Spacer's presence. His eyes went to the message Roger indicated. "I never sent that," he growled. "I never directed you to off-load the shipment at Shannon Airport. Who picked it up there?"

"How should I know? I only fly the plane." He turned to Spacer. "You work for Brannister?"

"No, I'm Charles Spacer . . . "

". . . from Conco International. Spacer, this is my pilot, Roger Haines." He glanced around for the rest of the crew. "What happened to Morgan and LeRoy?"

"They'll be waiting for me outside," Roger Haines said. "Look the goods were left at Shannon Airport. Don't give me any grief, Brannister. I limped in here with fuel tanks that were practically empty. As soon as we get a little rest and my tanks are full, the three of us are heading back to the States."

"If you had nothing to deliver," Spacer asked, "why did you come on to Dublin at all?"

"To collect my money and pick up a cargo for the States. We don't fly these things empty, you know."

"I'll get to the bottom of this," Brannister promised. "Come to my office after lunch." The pilot nodded and went off to meet his two crewmen.

"Valuable cargo?" Spacer asked.

"Damned valuable. I don't know what's going on here."

Spacer didn't know, either. Colman King had asked him to verify the arrival and transshipment of two Hatchtree 66 computers, but as near as he could tell they'd been dropped at Shannon Airport. Were they on their way to Russia, or did the IRA have some use for them? And was Brannister merely an innocent bystander?

The area around Mountjoy Square was alive with activity at mid-morning. Spacer slipped into the building, thankful there was no doorman, and took the elevator to Sentry's

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floor. "Who is it?" the bearded man asked, opening the door just a crack in response to his ring.

"Charles Spacer. Hope I'm not disturbing you."

"I told you to come tonight."

"It's got to be now. Something's come up."

Norman Sentry's head disappeared from the opening and Spacer wondered if he had a woman with him. He thought of Maeve O'Casey at once. Then Sentry said, "Very well," and opened the door.

Spacer entered and looked around. The bedroom door was closed. "I'm sorry to intrude on you like this . . . "

"Get to the point, Mr. Spacer."

"Do you have the information for me?"

"About Hatchtree, you mean?"

"Yes."

"It'll cost you 10,000 pounds. British, not Irish."

"How do I know you have anything to sell?"

"I have it."

"Then the money can be arranged."

"The money first."

Spacer smiled, moving casually about the room. "We seem to be in a deadlock. Why don't I suggest a possible compromise?" Now he was opposite the closed bedroom door. "Tell me what you know first and I'll promise not to reveal your source."

"How do you know my . . . ?"

Spacer reached over suddenly and opened the bedroom door. "You can come out now, Miss O'Casey."

But it wasn't Maeve O'Casey behind the door. It was Morgan, the blond navigator from the airport, and he had a small Beretta automatic aimed at Spacer's chest.

Norman Sentry chuckled at the surprised look on Spacer's face as he raised his hands and walked backward toward the sofa, directed by the motions of the gun in Morgan's hand. "Was that your trump card, Mr. Spacer? If so, you just overplayed your hand."

"Seems like it," Spacer admitted, sitting down hard.

"What are you, CIA or something?"

"Just a businessman trying to make an honest buck. A little industrial espionage never hurt anyone."

"If that's your fall-back cover story, it's not a very good one.

"What should we do with him?" Morgan asked, holding the

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gun steady.

"I'd like to drop him in the Liffey with no questions asked. But if he is working for the American government that could cause us more trouble than it's worth. Let's tie him to that kitchen chair and leave him here."

"What about our deal?" Spacer asked, as they led him to the chair.

"You came too soon," Sentry answered. "And you got too nosy."

Spacer's hands and feet were tied to the wooden chair and a gag was placed in his mouth. "What do we do with him after?" Morgan wanted to know.

"When it's over we'll release him," Sentry said. "Come on."

They went out the apartment door, leaving Spacer alone to contemplate his misfortune. Something was happening today, and he had not an inkling of what it was. Had Morgan, the navigator, faked the radio message directing Haines to land at Shannon and unload the Hatchtree computers there? Were they already on their way behind the Iron Curtain? He strained at the ropes around his wrists but they held firm.

He must have been there an hour when he heard a key turn in the lock. The door opened slowly inward and his eyes widened as he saw Maeve O'Casey slip into the apartment. He hadn't been completely wrong in his guesswork, only premature.

She didn't seem surprised to find him tied to the chair, and quickly removed the gag from his mouth and set to work on the ropes. "I was hoping they hadn't killed you," she told him. "It was my fault for mentioning Norman to you in the first place."

"How'd you get the key?"

"He gave me one when he was trying to romance me. When you mentioned selling guns to the IRA, it triggered Norman Sentry in my mind. That's not his real name, of course — it's a pseudonym he uses for his books. And he's not English, he's Irish. That's his closely guarded secret. The money from his best-selling novels goes to finance the IRA. Was Morgan with him — the navigator from the plane?"

"Yes," Spacer confirmed. She'd finally finished untying the knots and he yanked his hands free of the ropes, bending over to help untie his feet.

"The plane is carrying weapons for IRA terrorists. When it leaves Dublin, Morgan will force Haines to fly it to Northern

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Ireland instead of back home to America."

"What about LeRoy, the co-pilot?"

"Things have taken a nasty turn. LeRoy was killed an hour ago by a hit-and-run driver. I'm sure they'll replace him with an IRA member who can fly the plane while Morgan overpowers Roger Haines."

"Why didn't they unload the weapons here?"

"The Irish government forbids direct aid to the IRA. An Irish customs agent might wink at the contents of the plane as long as it stays on board, but he couldn't allow it to be unloaded here."

"And the Hatchtree computers?"

"You know a great deal, don't you, Mr. Spacer?"

He smiled at her. "I told you to call me Charles. I know the plane was carrying two Hatchtrees bound for Brannister Limited. It seemed more than was needed for a little machine-tool business."

"Daniel Brannister has always felt guilty for not being the man his father was. One of his customers, a Bulgarian businessman, approached him about buying two Hatchtrees, since the Bulgarian couldn't purchase them directly. There was a nice fee involved, and Daniel thought it could be his small contribution to the IRA cause."

"Where are the Hatchtrees now?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. In the air cargo building at Shannon Airport, over a hundred miles from here, I suppose."

"If Daniel Brannister didn't send the radio message to land at Shannon, who did?"

"I have no idea. I suppose Morgan might have faked it, or perhaps Norman Sentry managed to send it."

"For what reason?"

"You're the most obvious reason, Charles. You were snooping around yesterday, talking to Daniel and me, and even to Norman Sentry. Did you mention the Hatchtree to Norman?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"Then there's your answer. He feared you'd have customs seize the plane for those computers. In getting the Hatchtrees, they'd have been unable to overlook the weapons destined for the IRA. So Norman contacted Morgan on the plane with that fake message. With the Hatchtrees unloaded at Shannon, they could proceed with their original plan to fly the arms to Northern Ireland."

He admitted it made sense. Sentry would have given him some

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information that evening and earned another 10,000 pounds for the cause. It made sense, and yet . . . "

"I have to get to the airport," he decided. "That's where Sentry and Morgan will be."

But the first person he saw, as he entered the air cargo building with Maeve at his side, was Daniel Brannister. "I've talked to Shannon Airport three times," he growled. "They can't find any record of my shipment being unloaded last night or this morning."

Spacer hurried forward, leaving Maeve to deal with him. There was no way of knowing how soon Haines and his crew would be taking off, but he felt he had not a moment to lose.

He saw the cargo plane still at the hanger where it had landed that morning. The crew was boarding it — Haines and Morgan and a new co-pilot he didn't know. He started toward them, but almost at once Norman Sentry appeared to block his path.

"I didn't think we'd be seeing you again; not this soon."

"I'm getting on that plane," Spacer told him.

Sentry merely smiled. "No, you're not."

Spacer's right fist connected with Norman Sentry's jaw and the novelist staggered backward. He twisted and fell to the ground, and as he started to rise Spacer hit him again. This time he stayed down.

Spacer hurried up the steps and entered the plane. "What in hell do you want?" Morgan asked, but made no move to stop him.

"Where's the cargo?" Spacer asked, but already he'd found the door on his own and entered the cargo bay. Several large cases labeled *Farm Machinery* were clustered in the area over the wings, strapped into position. Spacer grabbed a crowbar and pried away one slat.

"What's going on here?" the pilot Haines asked, hurrying back from the cockpit. "We're set to take off."

"These are weapons for the IRA," Spacer told him. "Morgan and your new co-pilot are planning to kill you and fly the plane to Northern Ireland."

All three men were back there now, facing him. "We warned you to stay out of this," Morgan said.

The co-pilot, a swarthy man with dark eyes, slipped a pistol from under his flying jacket. "Haines, look out!" Spacer warned.

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But Haines never changed his expression. The co-pilot turned and shot Morgan through the right temple.

Haines glanced down at his fallen navigator. "Give me the gun, Pierre. I'll cover him while you get this plane onto the runway."

Pierre shifted the gun toward Spacer. "I kill him, too. Why not?"

"Because I say so. I want to find out what he knows."

"It's all becoming clear," Spacer said. "You had your co-pilot killed so Pierre could take his place. The plot was against Morgan and the IRA."

Roger Haines leveled the gun at Spacer as Pierre switched on the jet engines. "You think I can bother running Sten guns and plastic explosives when there's two-and-a-quarter million dollars in computers on board?"

"Of course," Spacer said. "They were always on board, weren't they? In those big crates that are supposed to contain the IRA weapons. You never unloaded the computers at Shannon because you never even landed at Shannon."

"You know that?"

"I know it. You said you were almost out of fuel when you landed here. But surely you would have refueled at Shannon before flying those last hundred or so miles on a nearly empty tank. Besides, Brannister's been calling Shannon and they have no record of the shipment. The Hatchtrees are right there behind me, with a few weapons inside the crates to fool the customs men. You knew they'd wink at the guns but they'd stick to the rules on the Hatchtrees."

"You're a smart guy," Haines told him. "How'd you get in on this, anyway?"

The plane was rolling now, taxiing onto the runway. "We suspected Brannister of transshipping the Hatchtrees to an Eastern Bloc country."

"Sure, he was going to do it. But why make a few hundred thousand for the IRA when I can take the computers myself and sell them to the Russians for the full two-and-a-quarter million?"

"Then this plane . . . ?"

" . . . is flying east, not west. I'm delivering the goods in person. They supplied Pierre to help me, and he got rid of LeRoy."

"You'll never make it."

"You think not? By the time anyone realizes what's happening we'll be in East German airspace."

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"You can never go back to America."

"With that much money, who cares. All these complicated transshipment deals with faked invoices! All you do is get in a plane and fly the stuff over."

"The East Germans will shoot you out of the sky."

Haines shook his head. "They know we're coming."

"Those Hatchtrees can be used to guide ICBMs."

"Don't go patriotic on me, mister."

Pierre called out from the cabin. "Cleared for takeoff!"

"I'll be right there," Haines said, raising the gun to take aim.

"I hope you're a better shot than Pierre was," Spacer said. "Morgan is still alive."

Haines only glanced down for a second, but that plus the motion of the plane was all that Charles Spacer needed.

Colman King shook his head and stared at the inside of the plane. "Did you kill this one, too, Charles?"

"That's Morgan, the navigator. Pierre shot him as soon as I came on board. He was IRA and believed those crates were full of weapons. He also knew the plane had never landed at Shannon Airport, but he thought the Hatchtrees were still back in New York. They had to kill him before they set a course for East Germany."

"What about the other two?"

"They're not bad off. Haines and Pierre should both live to tell their stories."

"I hope so. Now where are the Hatchtrees?"

Spacer pried off a few more boards from the packing cases. He tossed out two well-oiled submachine guns and then tore away more packing material. "Right here, all the time. Haines dreamed up the gun-running cover story so he could play the IRA against Brannister and fly the computers to East Germany himself. There never was a radio message to land at Shannon, of course. Morgan went along with it because he thought Haines was on their side."

Colman King nodded. "Thanks, Charles. I didn't realize it would be quite so dangerous."

"When money's involved, it's always dangerous," Spacer said.

He left the plane and walked back toward the air cargo building. It was growing dark and he wondered if Maeve O'Casey had waited for him. +

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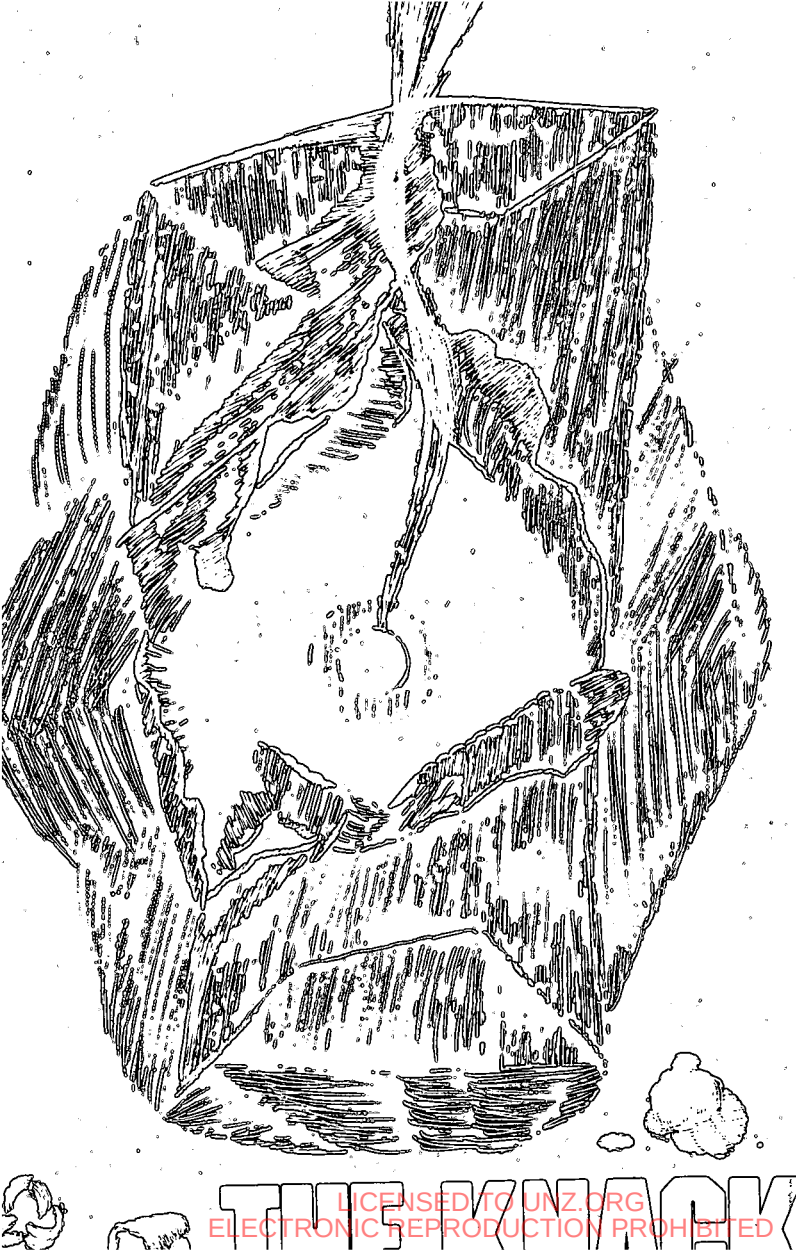

THE KNACK

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The broad's neck snapped like dried straw. It was a simple matter of going over to the bed, slapping one hand over her mouth, the other on the back of her head, then pulling and twisting. I could've done a dozen more without getting tired.

I went over and cracked the door, listened. The only sound I heard was the tick of the grandfather clock at the end of the hall. Her robe was draped across the chair at the side of her bed. I slipped it on her, found her house shoes.

Her night cap fell off when I picked her up, exposing stringy gray hair wrapped in foam rollers. Some women really get uptight about being seen in public with their hair in rollers. Just in case she'd been that type, and so everything would look right, I took the time to put the cap back on, then I carried her out into the hall. Even in dead weight, she didn't feel any heavier than a twelve pack. I got my hands under her arms, stood her at the head of the stairs and let go.

As arranged, I met Cliff in the park at noon the next day. I was sitting on the bench by the lagoon, watching some old man throw popcorn to the pigeons. There was a big gray one in particular who seemed to be getting most of it. I wondered how fast they would gobble it up if I could've dumped some rat poison into the old man's bag. I could see the big, gray one try taking to the air and doing a nose dive into the lagoon. Or maybe the whole bunch would be flying somewhere when the poison took effect. Talk about raining cats and dogs. It was something I'd have to try one day soon.

Cliff plopped on the bench next to me. We were both the same age but he looked much older with his dark heavy beard.

"Well?" he said, and I handed him the newspaper

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clippings.

I'd cut the top one out this morning. It had been stuck in the corner of the obituary page and told in brief detail of the death of a nursing home resident who'd fallen down the stairs during the night. There were three other clippings; a hit and run attributed to some kids joyriding in a stolen car, a boating accident, and a suicide.

"You've done very well."

"I have a knack for it."

"Indeed you do. You've taken care of their northeast sleeper wing single-handedly."

"That's the way the orders were cut," I said, noticing a slight hesitancy in Cliff's usual clip delivery. "You sound like you didn't expect me to complete the job."

"No, on the contrary, I was the only one at the agency who felt you would."

"What kind of game are we playing now?"

"No games," Cliff said, looking directly at me. "The agency needs dedicated people who strive to do a complete, thorough job. It's when those attributes are perversed into an obsessive pleasure that we have to initiate more stringent controls."

It was the old desk jockey jabber. They get out of the field and they get soft. Now they wanted to get rid of me for doing my job too well. I'd never come close to how good I could really be, but I'd show them, and I'd enjoy it all the way. Four stiff fingers into Cliff's throat would make a good start.

Just for a second, Cliff's eyes flickered and he glanced to his left. I swung around, digging for the .45 in my belt.

The old man was less than ten feet away, his hand deep in the popcorn bag. I gripped the butt of my .45 but the bag burst with a spray of popcorn and the golden flame of a silenced revolver.

The old man was good, too. ⊣

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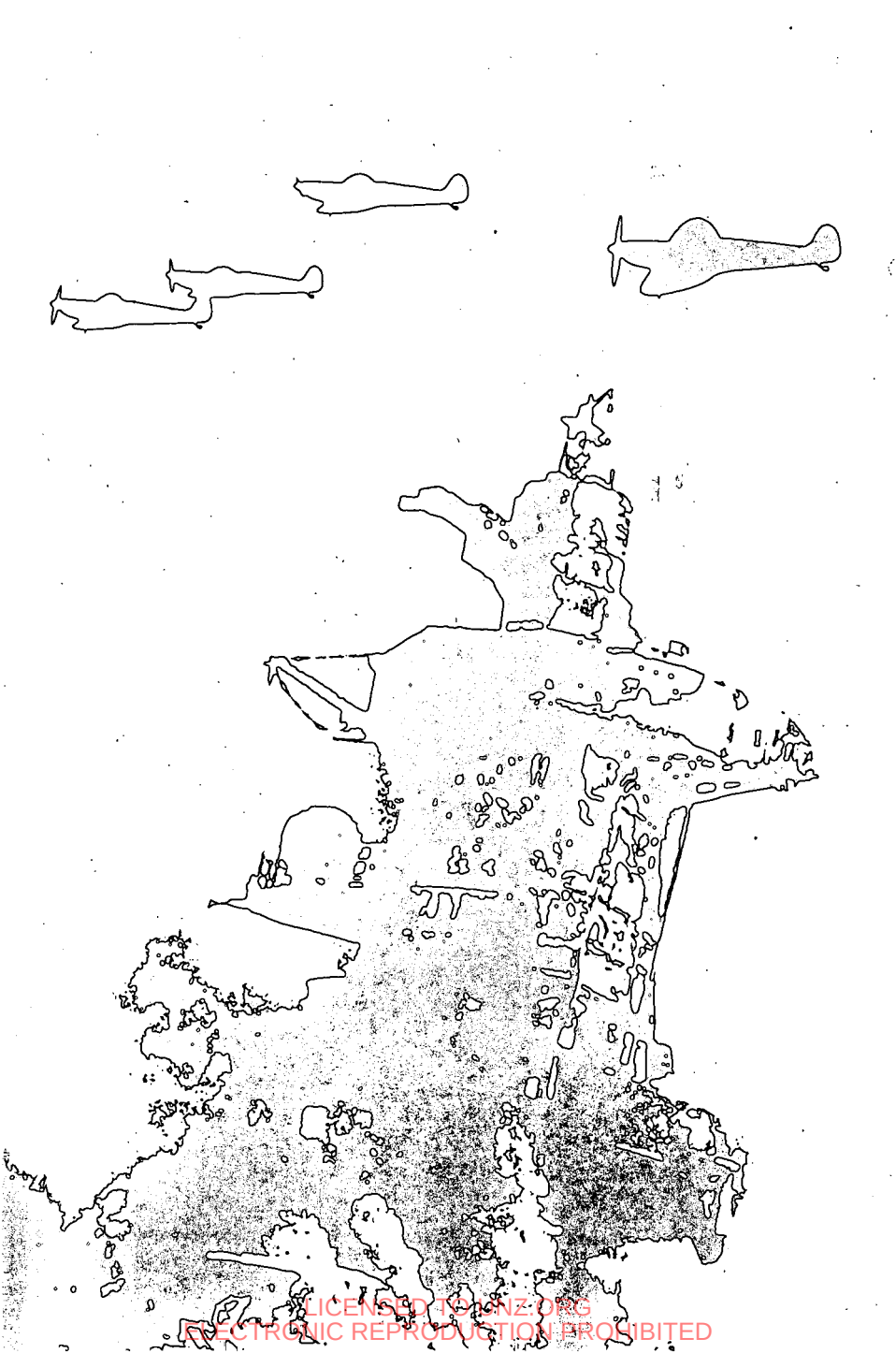

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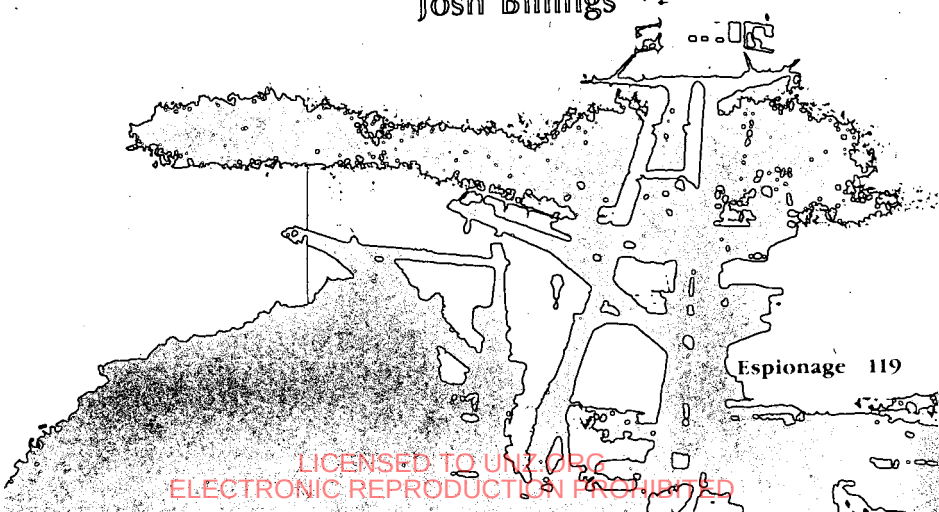
THE INTELLIGENCE PROCESS

by Ernest Volkman

It ain't what a man doesn't know that makes him a fool, but what he knows that ain't so. — Josh Billings



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United States Army Lieutenant Leslie A. Skinner was not an especially popular man with most of his neighbors on the Army's Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland during 1934. For one thing, there was the matter of all that banging and clanging which rang out each night from the basement workshop of the young ordinance officer's home. Worse, each Sunday morning — a sanctified non-duty day of rest for most military personnel — the quiet was shattered by loud explosions as Skinner would take whatever strange contraption he was building in his basement out to an empty post firing range for testing.

Nobody seemed to know quite what Skinner was tinkering with, and the man himself, a notoriously taciturn loner, did not encourage questions. Possibly, it was some of the Aberdeen gossip about Skinner's contraption that moved a member of a visiting German military delegation to Aberdeen one Sunday morning in the fall of that year to wander over toward a firing range. There, he saw Skinner loading what appeared to be a small bomb with rocket-like fins onto a long rail.

The German Wehrmacht officer tried to start up a conversation with Skinner, but he had no sooner mentioned the word "rocket" when Skinner packed up his equipment and stalked off. Nonplussed, the German officer stood at the spot for a full minute, shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

At first glance, this seems an odd way to begin a discussion of the craft of intelligence, and yet there is much to heed in this obscure little incident 50 years ago on a Depression-era Army post. For what happened there that Sunday morning ultimately amounted to an intelligence failure that was to cost a number of lives and have a direct impact on the course of World War II.

The failure in this case falls directly on the shoulders of the German officer. We do not know his name, for there is no record that he later filed any report on what he had seen and heard at Aberdeen that day. A curious oversight, for the officer, attached to the German military attache office in the Washington embassy, was, presumably, a functioning intelligence officer, as were (and still are) all military attaches. Nevertheless, he apparently never bothered to record the fact that an American Army officer was testing a military rocket. Given the size of the rocket the German officer observed, not too much effort would have been required to deduce that it was some sort of anti-tank rocket, a further clue being the fins (which meant that the rocket was designed for stabilized flight). Subsequently, there is no record that the Germans ever tried

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to discover the extent of American rocket development, nor, even more to the point, was there any attempt to discover if any American rocket might pose a threat to the armadas of tanks Germany was then starting to build as the backbone of its new army.

Eight years later, in North Africa, Germans paid dearly for that oversight when they encountered a nasty technological surprise: an American shoulder-fired, anti-tank rocket, invented by Skinner and nicknamed "bazooka" by GIs, that blew the turrets off German Panzers. (One entire detachment of German tanks surrendered after being fired on from long range by bazookas; the detachment commander thought he had been zeroed in by artillery.) Skinner's invention had come back to haunt the Germans, who finally managed to capture one bazooka intact. They simply copied the weapon with a few refinements, renamed it Panzerfaust, and crash-produced thousands in a desperate attempt to stem the tide of Allied armor.*

But it was too late; Skinner had provided the foot soldier with an equalizer to the feared German tanks that had terrorized infantry for years all over Europe. For the Germans, the intelligence failure was double-edged: not only did the bazooka threaten Germany's own tanks, but since the Wehrmacht had no anti-tank rockets of its own, that meant any new tank design with upgraded armor which could withstand German anti-tank artillery would have a great advantage. And that is precisely what happened, even before the advent of Skinner's bazooka. In July 1941, units of General Heinz Guderian's Second Panzer Army, spearheading the German thrust into Russia, frantically reported attacks by a new Russian tank they had never seen before, an extremely mobile machine whose sloped armor seemed impervious to the best German anti-tank shells (one Russian tank required 13 shell hits before being knocked out of action). The Germans had encountered, for the first time, the famed T-34 tank, whose superior mobility and armor were years ahead of any existing tank design. Only the Russians' inability to use their wonder tanks properly in massed

*Some 40 years after the bazooka's sensational debut in North America, the U.S. Army had developed the latest generation successor to Skinner's original design. Called Viper, it was plagued by such severe technical problems that Congress ordered the Army to consider buying superior foreign anti-tank rockets – among them, ironically, West Germany's Panzerfaust III, linear descendant of the World War II copy.

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formations prevented a greater German disaster, although when the Russians finally did learn how to manage armored warfare, it was the T-34 which spearheaded the final drive that ended in the streets of Berlin. (Guderian only half-jokingly proposed at one point that the Germans simply reproduce the T-34 design exactly, paint swastikas on them and send "German T-34s" into battle. This suggestion was immediately rejected by a humorless high command, which noted the loss of face the supposedly mighty German war machine would suffer were it to copy a tank design from the "subhuman" Russians.)

In the larger context of World War II, and its many intelligence failures, the bazooka incident is virtually unknown. Yet, it offers a vital clue to the intelligence process, because that process, fundamentally, concerns human perceptions and human judgments. And that explains why there are still continuing failures in intelligence, despite increasingly elaborate technical collection systems.

The Germans were surprised by the appearance of the American bazooka, despite the fact that its inventor had inadvertently demonstrated the weapon right under the German intelligence officer's nose. Why? Possibly, the intelligence officer was lazy or incompetent, but a more likely explanation is that he represented a cultural mindset that, proud of its traditional scientific and technological mastery, refused to consider even the possibility of any other nation developing superior technology, especially military technology. He did not see because he was conditioned not to see.

This phenomenon is even more obvious in the case of the T-34 tank: the Germans were completely surprised by the appearance of this tank, despite the fact that the Russians had not taken too many pains to hide it. The German Army's 1941 tank recognition manual contained no mention of the T-34, although the Russians had first used the tank more than a year before during border clashes in the Far East with Japan, a close German ally. But German intelligence refused to believe that the Russians, whom they considered technological Neanderthals, could possibly build a tank superior to those produced by the vaunted German technology. This myopia persisted even in the face of more direct evidence: in May, 1941, the Russians showed off their Stalin Tank School near Moscow to American news reporters. *Life* magazine published pictures of the school, including shots clearly showing the new T-34s, which first entered large-scale production in 1940. This uncharacteristic openness by the Russians, allowing a rare peek inside their military establishment, was in-

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tended as a warning to the Germans of the power of the Red Army. It was a none-too-subtle hint that failed completely. German intelligence persisted in its belief that no such advanced design as the T-34 could possibly exist, and a month later, the Germans invaded the Soviet Union and soon encountered the "nonexistent" tank.

It was tempting to believe that the German blindness was a symptom of totalitarian societies in general, where rigidly-enforced belief systems tend to spawn narrow thinking imposed from above, or no thinking at all. But the fact is that democracies, including the United States, are just as subject to horrendous intelligence failures. Indeed, it is possible to recite a history of American intelligence solely in terms of a long litany of failure, ranging from Pearl Harbor to Vietnam. That would be an oversimplification, yet the truth remains: every American president, from Wilson to the present day, has experienced at least one major foreign policy disaster that was directly attributable to either a lack of adequate intelligence or an outright failure to understand the intelligence at hand.

To understand how that has come about, a few words about the intelligence process itself are in order.

To begin with, it is important to remember that there is a difference between information and intelligence, which can be broadly defined as processed information. The process is roughly similar to the one that goes on each day inside newspaper offices – a large amount of information flows in, there to be digested, analyzed and processed into a package that the editors believe is a reasonably complete report on the important events of the day. In intelligence, the same process is often called "intellection," meaning the processing of information (sometimes termed "raw intelligence") into judgments. These judgments are given to policymakers (called "customers" or "users" in intelligence jargon), who are then supposed to make decisions based on them.

The vast bulk of any intelligence service's input comes from so-called "open" sources – publications, radio broadcasts, and a thousand and one other such clues. Suppose, for example, that country X is fearful of imminent attack from country Y. Thus, country X is watching Y's armed forces very carefully. Its intelligence service discovers, by the simple expedient of having its field agents keep their eyes open, that large numbers of country Y's high-ranking military officers are on leave. Cross-checked against other sources – is this possibly a deliberate deception? – X will conclude that war with Y is not imminent, since if it were, Y's military forces would be in a more heightened state of alert, with military

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leaves cancelled.

The tricky part is the intellection process itself, which is most often afflicted by the biases of the people who make the judgments, the predeliction of the "customers," and sometimes the sheer inability of intelligence analysts to make judgments because of lack of information. In the latter case, the judgments become hedged and indefinite, which induces either overcaution or simply wrongheaded conclusions. Ideally, intelligence should amount to the formula once summarized by Lieutenant General Samuel V. Wilson, former deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency: "We can't tell you what God is going to do on Tuesday of next week. But we probably can tell you when He's getting mad."

Which is to say that there is rarely an intelligence agency's conclusion that is precise in all details, unless there is an unparalleled, unimpeachable source. (Even ULTRA, the great British code-breaking operation of World War II that managed to read virtually all of the German high command's radio signals, was not an intelligence paragon. It could only read the German decisions and orders that were dispatched in radio form. It could not detect verbal orders, nor could it detect information sent by telephone over secure land lines. And, most importantly, it could not see inside the heads of Germany's military leadership.)

Among many Americans, there is a persistent conviction that there is something called "intelligence," by which is meant an empirical truth lying out there someplace, waiting to be detected. This conviction stems, in part, from a peculiar bias of American culture, which is dominated by an ethos that most, if not all, problems are soluble by systems. For that reason, modern American intelligence tends to distrust raw intelligence produced by human beings (called "humint" in American intelligence slang), the traditional cloak and dagger spy. Instead, the sprawling U.S. intelligence apparatus, which now includes about 150,000 people and spends more than $15 billion a year, concentrates its efforts on complicated technological systems to collect raw intelligence, leaving human beings the task of interpreting the meaning of the huge amounts of data collected. There are two basic sources of American intelligence. One is signal intelligence (known as "sigint"), which collects electronic transmissions, including radar, missile and satellite telemetry, coded signals, telephone transmissions, microwave beams and computer signals. The second is photo intelligence (called "photint"), which involves taking photographs or television pictures of targets of intelligence interest from overhead, mostly by satellite. Slightly less than 20 percent of all American intelligence is collected

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by human sources, the bulk of them CIA agents attached to embassies abroad and military intelligence personnel.

The theory is that the more intelligence produced by machine, the least likely it is to be subject to fallacies of human error. However, the best technology of modern American intelligence is as subject to human error as all intelligence always has been. The problem is twofold: first, the human beings who interpret the supposedly immutable "facts" produced by technical collection systems are just that, human. What a satellite picture might mean is subject to a whole range of human biases, most importantly political ones. Second, there is no intelligence system, even the massive American apparatus, that collects everything. What it collects is determined by a system of collection priorities, which in turn immediately involves questions of bias, since human beings decide what is important to collect, and what is not. For example, a number of experts in 1972 tried to convince the CIA to pay attention to the growing power of the petroleum exporting countries and the possible implications of American foreign policy. Their arguments went unheeded, and the 1973 OPEC oil boycott came as a complete shock, catching the United States totally unprepared.

Another popular belief about American intelligence is that there is some sort of correlation between quantity and quality of intelligence; the greater the amount of raw intelligence collected, the more likely that the "truth" will be unearthed. Again, this is a peculiarly American bias, for in a country where the microcircuit and the resulting information explosion were born, there is a prevailing faith that much intelligence work is a simple function of collection. For that reason, intelligence officials in the United States take great delight in recounting the wonders of their technical collection systems: how their spy satellites can spot golf balls lying on the grass from thousands of miles in space, or how new television reconnaissance devices can spot people walking on the streets of Moscow from satellites hundreds of miles above their heads.

But quantity is no guarantee of anything, save quantity; the most detailed raw intelligence is only a pile of filmstrips and paper unless there is somebody around who can understand what it all means. Modern history is instructive in this regard: the truth is that error is the most commonplace feature of all modern intelligence, American included. Indeed, it is interesting how often colossal blunders and gross miscalculations recur with distressing regularity, despite truly awesome tools of modern technology. The development is even more remarkable, considering the

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fact that intelligence enjoys something of a vogue in contemporary politics. An ingrained part of all modern statecraft, intelligence is now devoid of the old onus connected with espionage and is even officially enshrined in diplomatic agreements, witness the American-Soviet arms limitation agreements that include provisions (called "national technical means" in diplomatese) guaranteeing each nation unimpeded spy satellite overflights. To a great extent, intelligence has become institutionalized, outfitted with assorted bureaucratic trappings to make it somewhat respectable – a development that would be unrecognizable to the old cloak and dagger generation. That generation would also have trouble recognizing the transformation of the spy into its modern version, "intelligence officer." (The word "spy" is gradually disappearing from the modern political lexicon.)

Yet, despite all this, it seems that the more we collect, the less we seem to know about what's really going on. The chief reason is that intelligence has been outrun by technology; American intelligence, especially, is flooded by the mountains of data they so assiduously collect. That means the humans who are supposed to be interpreting this ocean of material are often overwhelmed. Moreover, the tail is wagging the dog: an increasing percentage of human resources is expended in collection, rather than analysis. Or, as Lady Astor was reputed to have said during that fateful night aboard the Titanic, "I asked for a glass of ice water, but this is ridiculous."

And even when the "truth" seems self-evident from the mountains of data, there is still no guarantee that the most solid intelligence will have any impact. Again, the problem is human: policymakers are often products of a catechism of assumptions and political beliefs which no amount of information or intelligence will shake. There are legions of recent historical examples; perhaps the most striking contemporary one is Vietnam. In Vietnam, despite all evidence of history to the contrary, the United States believed as an article of faith that it could "win" by transforming South Vietnam's rickety regime into some sort of bulwark against which North Vietnam and the Vietnamese Communist movement would be dashed to pieces.

This delusionary process has been called "the pleasure of self-deception," an accurate phrase which describes the dynamic underlying an interesting statistic: of nine major surprise strategic attacks throughout the world since 1940, not one was truly a surprise. In each case, leaders of the nations about to be attacked knew such an attack was imminent, and in some cases were in possession of detailed intelligence

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giving the date and hour of the attack. Yet, the leaders simply did not believe, so they discounted the intelligence which ran counter to what they knew in their heart of hearts was "fact." Not even a series of aggressive moves before the attack, unmistakably tipping the attacker's hand, could dissuade them. And so Josef Stalin in 1941 refused to believe a German invasion was imminent – "British provocation" he contemptuously scrawled across one intelligence report giving the precise day of the Nazi attack – and as a result, the Germans virtually wiped out the unalerted Red Air Force in the first few hours, their task eased considerably by Soviet planes parked wingtip to wingtip. Twenty-seven years later, the three top commanders of NATO went off on leave after discounting intelligence reports warning of an imminent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia; several hours after reaching their vacation spots, they heard on the radio that the invasion they had deemed "impossible" had taken place.

The consequences of the self-deception process can be catastrophic, for fundamentally all intelligence is about warning. Is danger imminent? Is the other side about to move? What are the significant trends? As Stalin's blindness in 1941 proved, intelligence most often is only as good as the people who are supposed to be using it. By no means, however, is Stalin's appalling error the only example of intelligence failure of similar magnitude during World War II. There are a number of others, but that war provides the greatest example of pure intelligence myopia: Adolf Hitler. And it is in Hitler that we can find the perfect case history of human failures that bedevil intelligence judgments. →

To be continued . . .

Ernest Volkman is a writer on intelligence and national security affairs whose work has appeared in a wide variety of publications. Currently a Contributing Editor of Penthouse magazine, where he handles national security investigations, his reports on intelligence technology also appear in Military Science and Technology, and Defense Science magazines. A former prize-winning National Editor and National Correspondent for Newsday, Volkman is the author of Legacy of Hate, published in 1982. The Devil's Sabbath, his history of American intelligence operations, will be published by Morrow early in 1985.

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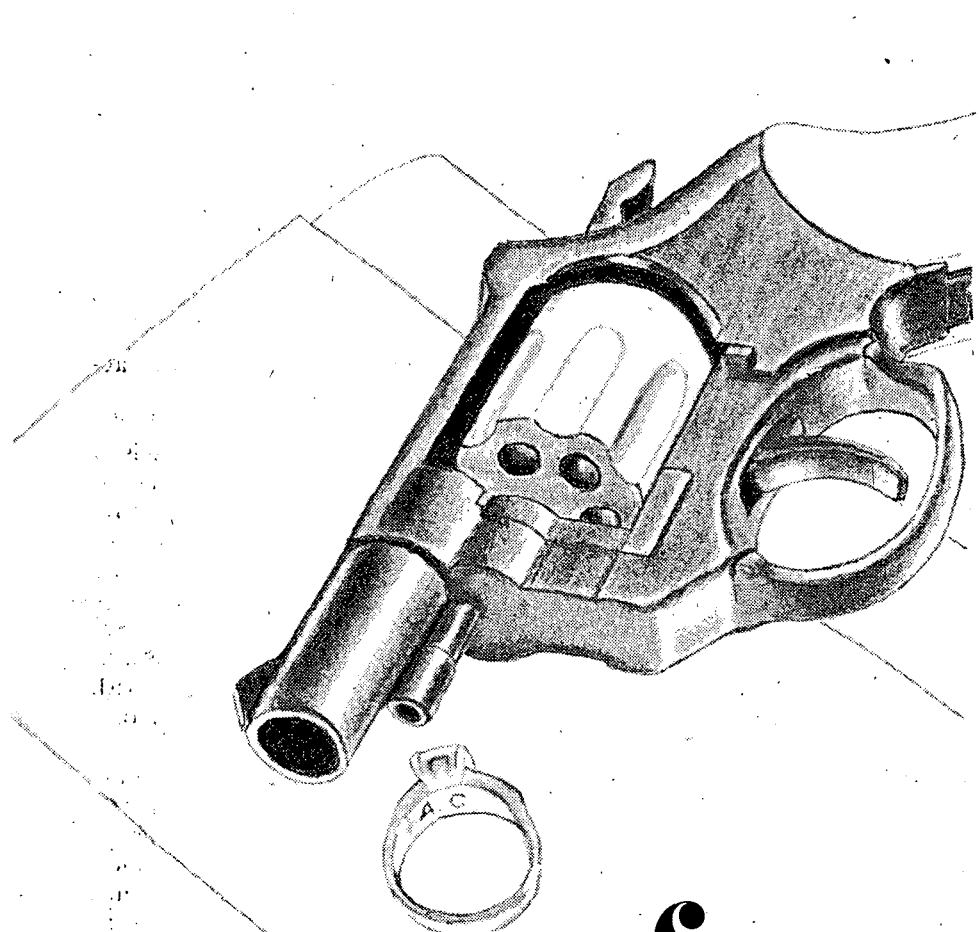

Winds Of Change

by John Lutz

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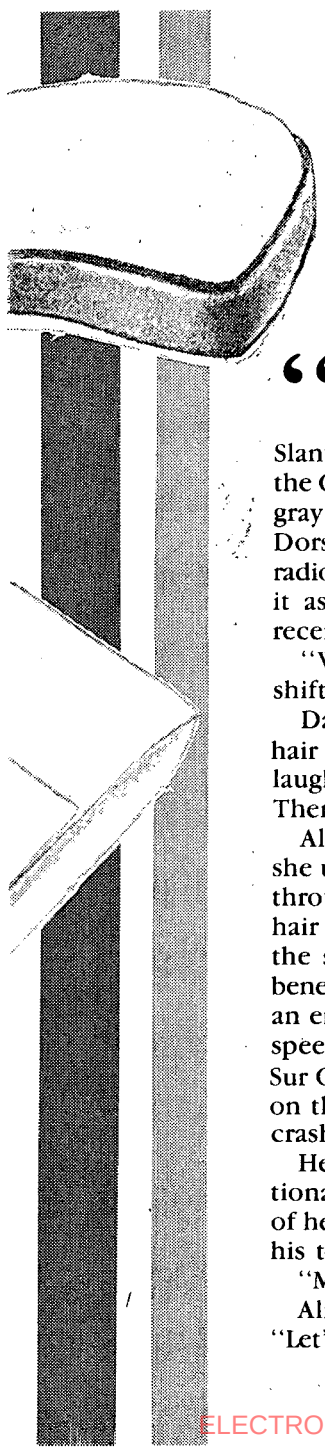

"Last night when I was with my wife I accidentally spoke your name."

Alison didn't answer David immediately. Slanted sunlight blasted from between the clouds in the California sky and glinted off the highly polished gray hood of her 1936 Chevy convertible. Tommy Dorsey's band was playing swing on the dashboard radio. The car was five years old, but Alison regarded it as if it were the newest model. She had only recently been able to afford such a luxury.

"What was your wife's reaction?" she asked at last, shifting gears for a steep grade in the twisting road.

David threw back his handsome head, his blond hair whipping forward in the turmoil of wind, and laughed. "None. She didn't understand me, I'm sure. There's so much she doesn't understand about me."

Alison didn't caution him to be more discreet, as she usually did. She seemed lulled by their motion through the warm, balmy evening. Her long auburn hair flowed gracefully where it curled from beneath the scarf that covered her head and was knotted beneath her chin. She knew that she and David were an enviable young couple in her sleek convertible, speeding along the coast road in mountainous Big Sur Country, with the shaded, thick redwood forest on their right and the sea, charging the shore and crashing sun-shot against the rocks on their left.

He extended a long arm and languidly, affectionately, dragged his fingertips across the shoulder of her wool sweater. She felt her heart accelerate at his touch.

"My wife doesn't know you're a spy," he said.

Alison turned her head toward him and smiled. "Let's hope not."

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Illustration by Bruce Baker

She braked the convertible, shifted gears again, and pulled to the side of the highway. Then she drove up the narrow, faintly defined dirt road that led to their usual picnic place. Within a few minutes, the car was parked in the shade of the redwood trees of smaller variety that grew in that wild section of California.

She got the wicker picnic basket from the trunk, watching David's tall, lanky frame as he quite carefully spread the blanket on the grass. David was a methodical person, which was why he was good at his job; he had a talent and fondness for order. Alison stopped and deftly straightened the seams of her nylons, then joined him.

Alison Carter and David Blaine both worked at Norris Aircraft Corporation just north of Los Angeles. Alison was a secretary and David the chief of security. The people who were paying Alison for information about the top-secret XP25 pursuit plane had advised her to strike up an acquaintance with the plant security chief. If she were caught, the relationship would be a valuable insurance policy.

Of course Alison had followed their advice. She believed everything they told her. She had been barely eighteen when Karl Prager had first approached her, had first become her lover. Nineteen when their affair was over and she was in too deeply as an informer ever to hope she might get out.

Not that it had bothered Alison to sell "industrial information." Oh, she knew she was working for the Germans, actually, but what difference did that make? It wasn't as if America was at war. Politics didn't interest Alison in the slightest, and the money Karl paid her more than doubled her meager salary earned as a secretary.

Alison hadn't had to think of a way to meet David. Her rather extravagant habits, considering her salary, prompted him to ask her some routine questions one day. When she'd told him she was the beneficiary of her late father's will, he'd believed her.

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They'd seen each other again, after business hours, despite the fact that David was married. Apparently he and his wife Glenda were having difficulties. For Alison, the business of seducing the shy and precise David Blaine quickly became pleasure. And by the time he found out she was violating company rules, he was willing to overlook her transgressions.

On Saturdays, David would often give Glenda an excuse, that probably even she didn't believe, and he and Alison would drive up the coast road in Alison's convertible and picnic with sandwiches and champagne in their private, lover's hideaway.

Alison sat down beside David on the blanket. She untied and removed her head scarf, plucking out the bobby pins helping to hold it in place. Through the trees, the undulating blue-green sea was barely visible, but she could hear its enigmatic whisper on the rocky beach.

David paused in unwrapping the sandwiches. He dug into his shirt pocket and handed Alison a folded sheet of paper patterned with scrawled numbers. "Here," he said casually, "these are the performance specifications you asked for."

The figures represented the data on the experimental plane's latest test flight. Alison accepted the paper with a smile and slipped it into a pocket of her skirt. She knew that David took the business of revealing company information no more seriously than she did. He didn't know to whom she was giving the information — probably he assumed it was a rival aircraft manufacturer — and he didn't care. It was his love affair that was important to him, that had consumed his very soul, and not dry columns of figures that meant nothing except to an aeronautical engineer. He knew he'd be fired if the company found out about Alison and him, but he could always get another job of some sort. And he'd still have Alison.

After they'd eaten the ham sandwiches and

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finished the champagne, David looked at her with his level blue eyes. His head was resting in her lap, and she was stroking his fine blond hair that was just beginning to thin at the crown of his head. Alison had thought the first time she saw David that he looked very much like movie star Richard Widmark.

"There's so much I want to say to you today," he told her.

"Not now," she said, bending her body and kissing him on the lips. "Let's not talk now."

As usual, David saw her point of view and agreed with it.

An hour later, in the purpling twilight, Alison lay on her back and watched a plane drone high overhead in the direction of the sea. A U.S. Navy plane, she noted, on a routine nighttime training mission.

David was asleep beside her, his deep, regular breathing merging with the sounds of the plane and the eternal sighing of the sea. Though her body was very still alongside his sleeping form, Alison's mind was tortured and turning.

Not that she had any real choice. Her time of choices was over. She wished David had never told her about speaking her name in front of his wife. But he had. And Alison knew that he might speak her name again in the wrong circumstances, even if tomorrow he still saw things her way.

Quietly, she rose from the blanket and fished in her straw purse for her key ring. She walked to her car, the tall grass tickling her bare feet and ankles, thinking *tomorrow, tomorrow* . . .

She unlocked and opened the car's trunk, and left it open as she returned to stand over David. She was holding a small revolver that she'd gotten from the trunk, the gun they had given her.

Alison didn't want to miss where she was aiming, didn't want to hurt him more than necessary. She did love him.

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She knelt beside David, placing the gun barrel inches from his temple, and glanced in all directions to make certain they were alone. In the sudden chill breeze rushing in from the ocean, she drew in her breath sharply and squeezed the trigger.

The crack of the gun seemed feeble in the vastness of mountains and sea.

Alison sat with her eyes clenched shut until the sound of David moving on the blanket ceased. Then, still not looking at him, she returned to the car and got a shovel from the trunk.

She wrapped David's still body in the blanket and dragged it deeper into the forest. She began to dig.

In a very few hours, halfway around the world, a signal would be given, and the Japanese would attack Pearl Harbor. War would immediately be declared, not only against Japan but against Germany and Italy as well. The rules of the game Alison was being forced to play would abruptly change. Who knew if David would have been willing to continue to play if the stakes were real? Who could say what else he might have accidentally let slip to his wife? Alison knew that much more than her job, and perhaps a criminal record, depended on David's silence now. Her survival was at stake.

As she cast loose earth over the huddled, motionless form in the blanket, Alison didn't realize she was burying a ring in David's pocket, the engagement ring he had intended to give her when he awoke. The ring with her initials engraved inside the band. The ring wrapped loosely in a copy of the letter he had written to his wife, confessing everything and explaining why he was leaving her.

Alison worked frantically with the shovel, feeling her tears track hotly down her cheeks. At least David's war was over. He was at peace. Her war was just beginning, and look what it had already forced her to do.

She would be one of the first to realize why hers was a losing cause. ⊣

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A CAMEO DISAPPEARANCE

by E. Brooks Peters

The moon hung like an art-deco light bulb in the sky. It was one of those glorious New York nights in mid-October, when the sky is crystal clear and the temperature drops to that delightful degree that permits the wearing of a short fur wrap without concern for warmth. The kind of night when you feel as if you can see all the way across the Hudson to New Jersey and pick out the families huddling in front of their television sets watching the news, trying to catch a glimpse of you as you whirl through town on a series of social events.

The crowd at Lincoln Center was brisk and eager. It was the opening of the new season, and the majority of men were wearing tuxedoes. Those who didn't couldn't afford to rent them and probably had standing room tickets anyway. The men smoked cigars and rattled on about the market and horses. The women listened, making mental notes to buy and sell, and flashed their jewels to keep their men off-guard.

The sleek black limo snaked its way through the gnarled traffic along Broadway. Inside, Tyler Cliff stretched his legs, checked his black satin bow tie, and poured himself another Glenfiddich. He was going to be late. No way around it. The only way to get to the Met by eight would be to get out of the limo and walk. But

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Illustration by Rob Richard

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Tyler Cliff didn't walk to the opera.

He buzzed his chauffeur. The black screen slid into its slot and Tyler could see the face of the chauffeur in the rear-view mirror.

"How many more blocks?" Tyler asked through the divider.

"Just around the bend here, sir," the young man spoke eagerly. "Another five minutes at the most, sir." Tyler put his drink back on the bar and leaned forward.

"Pull up to the side entrance as usual."

"As you wish, sir. Sorry about the traffic," the young driver apologized.

"It's not your fault we're late," Tyler responded in a voice which betrayed a slight irritation. He was still furious with Valerie. Why did she have to cancel their date at the last minute? It was her idea to go to the opera in the first place. He'd already seen it last year and, frankly, he just wasn't up to another night of false smiles and moist handshakes. He would just have to give his other ticket away.

The stretch slinked along 66th Street. Smoothly the chauffeur pulled alongside the curb, a few feet from a tall embankment of steps.

"We're here."

Tyler looked at his watch. It was five past eight. They couldn't have started the damned opera yet. That wouldn't allow enough time for the well-dressed Monday nighters to see Tyler Cliff make his entrance. They were all waiting for him, eager to get a glimpse of the world famous fashion designer. The most eligible bachelor in all of America. The incredibly handsome, wildly sophisticated, vulgarly rich Tyler Cliff. Everyone wanted to see him. He was the most sought after guest at every party, every social, every opening. He was the star of New York's social world.

Tyler pulled the little mirror down from the carpeted wall in front of him. He checked himself. His face maintained the special good looks of a young model. Firm tan skin, clear blue eyes, fine wavy blonde hair. His dark eyebrows evoked a hidden sense of mystery. He'd made a fortune selling his clothes by modeling many of them himself. Tyler could not help but chuckle, still, when he thought of his incredible success.

As Tyler stepped out of the limo, he noticed a small group of men circling the fountain outside Lincoln Center. They looked Hispanic. They were dressed in jeans and leather jackets, and were

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certainly out of place at the opening night of the Met. One of them nudged the fellow next to him, saying something in Spanish and pointing at Tyler.

Tyler wrote off his slight emotional reaction as another example of the discomfort one feels in being too well-dressed on occasion, especially in a city of extremes. He moved quickly past them and through the Met's revolving doors.

There was an audible murmur when Tyler entered the lobby of the opera house. People milling about, regarding schedules, sipping wine, chatting about what they'd done that summer, all stopped and stared. Some smiled at him. Some nodded to each other and spoke in hushed tones. Others avoided eye contact and lifted their heads a bit higher and spoke in louder voices. Still others, most of them younger women, moved closer to get a better look at Tyler Cliff.

He was joined by a group of friends almost immediately. Paul Raleigh, the owner of a large department store, was there with his wife. Raleigh slapped Tyler on the back and remarked how well he was looking. Zarah Raleigh looked up into Tyler's face and opened her big eyes even wider as she took in his good looks.

She looks like Imelda Marcos tonight, Tyler thought, and she seemed to be as demanding. Tyler noticed that she was wearing a magnificent cameo brooch just below her neck. It was an extremely beautiful rendition of *Liberty.*

She clutched his arm. "Oh Tyler, you must have dinner with us soon. I've purchased the most divine new apartment in the Trump Tower. You can see Connecticut from my window."

"I hope you have blinds," Tyler replied, a chiding look in his eye.

"Let's go in, it's about to start," Zarah tugged Tyler towards the entrance to the theater. "Isn't she just . . . brilliant? She's one of my dearest friends . . . ," Zarah spoke as they moved through the crowds. She was referring to the evening's star, Mariella Bravas, the Argentine soprano who raised many eyebrows when she dropped the seventh veil doing *Salome.* She was opening the season for the third time. Tyler had known her since she was a classmate of his at Yale. He had listened to her warm-ups in the shower. Theirs had been a tempestuous affair and even after all these years, she and Tyler enjoyed a warm friendship.

Tyler surveyed the scene as they joined the throngs moving into the auditorium. He looked up towards the "Family Circle." Stand-

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ing right in front of the balcony was the Hispanic who'd pointed at him outside. Tyler smiled, realizing it had been silly for him to have felt threatened by the man.

The rest of the people in the "Circle" were seated and Tyler had to squint to make out faces. Most of them were peering down at him. Some used opera glasses. One girl nudged her neighbor and giggled.

Zarah left Tyler at the fourth row. She and her husband had chairs — seats with their names engraved on the backs. They were true patrons of the opera, donating thousands of dollars a year to the institution. Zarah was sure to remind Tyler that she had paid for tonight's production. She always did. Tyler made his way to his seat in the second row and sat down.

The lights began to dim. Tyler looked at the people surrounding him — over fifty, properly dressed, plump with good life, perhaps a trifle weary — and then remembered his extra ticket. He checked to see if there was anyone standing who could use the free seat. He thought he saw a tall blond man wearing a trench coat standing by the door. He looked out of place. Tyler decided to ask him if he needed a seat. But as he was about to get up, the lights went out and he could no longer see the man.

The conductor stepped forward and made his way through the mass of black garbed musicians in the orchestra. He stood on his pedestal and bowed to the audience. Then, with a click of the baton, he started to conduct. The music was ethereal, romantic stuff. The opera was *Dialogue Of the Carmelites* — the story of a group of defiant nuns during the French Revolution.

The curtain was raised. There, on stage, was a huge cross raised on a platform. On the cross, one could make out the prostrate figures of twenty nuns, lying flat on their stomachs, their arms outstretched in prayer. It was a stirring vision. Tyler was mesmerized anew.

The nun at the front of the stage rose and stepped forward. It was Mariella Bravas. She opened her mouth to sing, but then there was a faint sound of breaking glass and instead of singing, she screamed.

There was a brief second of absolute stillness during which the scream echoed throughout the house. Then, as if each moment were frozen in time, figures moved in slow motion; consecutively, people began to react.

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The orchestra threw down its instruments as wisps of a thick, greasy smoke arose from the orchestra pit, clouding the entire area. The black figures of the musicians scratched at the transparent smoke amid wild cries of pain that shattered the silence. Then, the smoke rose to the stage and the nuns began to cough and sputter, interspersing their heaving with high-pitched screams.

It still wasn't clear to those in the orchestra seats exactly what had happened. Then, as if a lightning bolt had struck him, Tyler felt a sharp pain blast through his nose. His lungs went into spasms and his eyes shot out tears of undiluted excruciating agony. He grabbed at his throat, scratching at his neck — and recognized the occurrence. It was the same gas that had been exploded in his face when he was a student at Yale in the sixties. Someone had dropped a tear gas bomb at the Met.

The place exploded into pandemonium. Tyler looked back to Zarah. She had fallen down and her husband was trying to lift her. He was hampered somewhat by a very old woman in mink who scrambled out from underneath them. Row by row, the crowds in the orchestra seats scurried to get to the side entrances. People were screaming, tripping, crying into their handkerchiefs, and gasping for air. The rich and mighty clawed at each other like rats locked in a trunk.

Tyler looked upwards. As yet, the gas had not risen high enough to affect the people in the balcony seats, though they hung over the railing inspecting the scene of ruin below. Then, as the gas rose, infiltrating their space, the first balcony cried out in unison and Tyler could see people jumping off the front tier to the orchestra seats below. He noticed the Hispanic was no longer there.

Tier by tier, the screams continued. The theater was completely inundated with the poisonous gas and everyone wanted out.

Tyler cut across a row by hopping over two seats and running for the side. He propped the door open with his back and covered his face with his handkerchief. He looked for Zarah and Paul but he couldn't see them. Giving up, he dashed through the door and out into the parking lot. At last he could feel the sweet, glorious influx of fresh air.

People started to rush by him, pushing, shoving, greedily sucking in clean air. He started to move with the tide but, just as he was passing a young couple giving each other mouth-to-mouth

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resuscitation, he saw the old woman in mink collapse to the ground. He bent down, scooped her up in his arms, and carried her to a less crowded area. She looked around with frightened eyes, clutching her purse tight against her bosom. Tyler tried to take her hand but she clenched her fist and pulled herself away from him. Then she bulldozed into the crowd and disappeared.

Outside the auditorium, Tyler caught up with Zarah and Paul. They were standing against the fountain, leaning over its refreshing spray. Zarah had burst into tears — her body bobbing up and down like a piece of driftwood in surf — and Paul stroked her back with his right hand.

"Good God! What a nightmare!" Paul cried out when he saw Tyler approaching.

"Are you both alright?"

"I'm fine. Stomach feels like someone took a baseball bat to it," Paul answered. Then indicating his wife, he added, "She's a wreck. The stench hit her right in the face. And she tore her gown." He consoled her by holding her closer to him.

"Who would do such a terrible thing?" Zarah screeched, her question cut short by her own angry scream. She grabbed at her neck, at the torn fabric of her gown, and collapsed to the concrete pavement.

"My brooch! The cameo! Oh no!" she cried, tears shooting from her dark brown eyes like bullets. "I've lost my brooch!"

It was true. She must have tripped on the satin length of her train when she fell, thereby pulling the fabric so taut that the brooch had popped off.

"It must have fallen off," Zarah sighed, her tears quickly spent.

"Come on, dear, we have to leave," Paul abruptly cut in.

"Do you want me to go back and look for it?" Tyler asked Zarah.

"No!" Paul answered abruptly for his wife.

"It won't take long, Paul," Zarah implored, but then something in Paul's gaze caused her to cease. "No, Tyler. Thanks for asking. You'd never find it anyway, And it wasn't worth anything; it was a gift. I wore it for sentimental reasons," she sniffled.

"Well, if you say so," Tyler said. "Take care of yourselves. See you again."

Zarah smiled and gently nodded her head goodbye. Paul grabbed her arm and pulled her away, and Tyler couldn't help but notice that Paul seemed unusually agitated, even in these extremely

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agitating circumstances. But as Zarah stepped towards the waiting limousine, she squealed in pain.

"Ow! My leg!" She pulled back the hem of her gown, exposing a mammoth bruise on her shin. It resembled an eggplant.

"I must have hurt myself when I fell," she said in a whimpering whine.

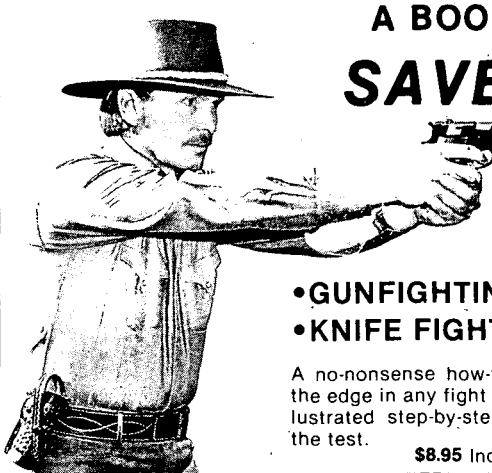
"How *did* you fall?" Tyler asked, staring at the strange bruise.

"I don't know."

"Looks like someone kicked you with a stiletto heel."

"Enough." Paul interrupted. "Really, now, Zarah, we must go!"

Tyler watched silently as Paul helped Zarah inside the car. There was definitely something odd about Paul's behavior, Tyler thought. But right now, he couldn't put his finger on it. He decided to hang around the Center and see what the police came up with after



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THE AUTHOR

Matt Braun is a former army officer and combat instructor who spent many years training troops and civilians in survival methods. Moreover, he's a survivor himself, and in terms you'll never forget, he reveals all the tricks of the trade.

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their investigation of the gas explosion. Tyler waved at the couple as their limo pulled away. Then he felt someone tap his shoulder as he was moving back toward the building.

"Mr. Cliff, may I have your autograph, please?" she said, giggling childishly.

"I . . . I'm not . . . " Tyler tried to back out but the grin on the girl's face immediately began to transform into the ugly shape of a sneer. Tyler did not want a sneer on the face of a prospective customer, even if she wouldn't look well in his clothes.

"I'm not adverse to it," he smiled. The sneer vanished from her face and was replaced by a charming grin. He signed the pink sheet she handed him and wrote, *It's your life, honey!* in his bold script. That was his motto; part of the ad campaign that had sold his clothes and made him a name to reckon with in the fashion world.

"Thanks a lot, Mr. Cliff," she squealed, as he performed a mock bow and turned on his heel. Over his shoulder he heard her yell — "You're *gorgeous,* Tyler!"

The backstage area was in a state of turmoil. The police had blocked off the dressing rooms from the press and the curious, but when Tyler Cliff walked into the receiving area, and nodded to Johnny, the security guard who knew him well, he was permitted entrance.

Roger Stevens, publicity director for the opera company, ran over to Tyler and threw his hands up in disgust.

"Tyler! It's just too dreadful! I can't believe anyone would do such a loathsome thing!"

"What about Bravas?", Tyler inquired. "Is she okay?" It would be a disaster if she lost her voice.

At that point, Stevens turned a dark blue and began to whimper uncontrollably.

"She's blind, Tyler! Totally blind!" he screamed. The whole room heard him. The press raced to the phones, and the exit doors for cabs back to their offices. The news was no longer that a bomb had been dropped at the Met, and hundreds of the rich had been exposed to danger; no, the news was that Mariella Bravas was blind. The world's greatest opera singer blinded by a terrorist's poisonous gas explosion! It was a front page story!

Tyler Cliff reacted to the news calmly, betraying none of the

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grief he felt. If she was permanently blind, it was a tragic loss. He had to see her.

"Is she still here," he whispered to Roger Stevens.

"Yes . . . the ambulance only just arrived. Can you believe it? The world's finest voice, the great Bravas, and the ambulance takes a half hour to arrive!"

Suddenly, there was a commotion behind him, closer to the dressing room area. Someone cried out, "It's her! It's Bravas!"

Behind the crowd, the door to Bravas' dressing room was opened and a portion of a stretcher was visible. And throughout the room the rich mellifluous vibrato of Mariella Bravas wailed:

"The bastards! I'll kill them. I'll kill them all!" Then her head passed the barrier of the door and the roomful of reporters and detectives fell silent. Mariella Bravas' face was hidden behind a series of white bandages, the only opening a slit for her mouth from which the cries and curses escaped.

Roger Stevens turned back to Tyler Cliff and almost fell to his knees, "Oh Tyler, I can't bear to watch! It's so . . . so . . . *ghastly*!"

At the sound of the name, Tyler, Mariella Bravas stopped her litany of profanity. She propped her head up and turned her bandaged face in the direction of Roger Stevens.

"Roger, darling, did you say Tyler? Tyler Cliff?"

"Yes, my diva, he's right here. He was there. He was a witness. He knows . . . "

"Shut up, Roger. Enough of the background. Tyler! Come here and soothe me."

Tyler Cliff stepped toward the great Bravas. "Mariella, my dear," he whispered into her ear, as he knelt next to her stretcher. "Let me take you to the hospital. I had no idea you were hurt." He clasped her left hand and gave it a tender squeeze.

"No . . . please don't bother, Ty. I'll be okay. My ambulance has arrived."

"Do they know who did it?" Tyler asked her quietly.

"They say it was a group of Hispanics. Terrorists," she answered in a hoarse voice.

Tyler leaned closer. Pressing his cheek against hers he could still smell the tear gas in her hair.

"The bastards!" she whispered again, but her voice trailed off as the searing pain in her eyes caused her to pass out.

Tyler rose and called to the awaiting ambulance men. "Take her

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to the hospital immediately. I'm afraid she's in shock."

The streets were thick with taxi cabs and out-of-town cars. Tyler Cliff had decided not to take his limo back to his penthouse apartment. It would be a long walk to 81st Street and Central Park West, but it would do him good.

Tyler went over the facts in his mind, as he stepped quickly along Columbus Avenue: The group of Hispanic men standing around the fountain. The one standing in the family circle. Then, the strange blond man in the trench coat at the door, directly in line with the aisle of seats that Paul and Zarah Raleigh sat in. He must have jumped over the seats when the bomb first exploded and grabbed the brooch and Zarah tripped and fell against the old woman. He wanted the cameo. But why? Could the brooch really be the reason the terrorists tear-gassed 4000 people at the opening of the Met? It was too extreme. It didn't make sense. There were a thousand other means of taking it away from her. Besides, what could be in that cameo that made it so valuable?

Suddenly, Tyler remembered something. A detail he had overlooked in the mad rush to seats and the hysteria that followed. That damn cameo, he thought. Of course. He turned around and hailed a cab. Raleigh had some explaining to do.

Tyler arrived at Trump Tower a little after nine-thirty, but there was no answer when the nightman buzzed the Raleigh's apartment. Tyler excused himself and then sneaked past the guard as another visitor approached. He took the elevator to their floor and found the Raleigh's door open. Security in Trump was good, but not good enough to leave a door wide open in New York City.

He entered the sumptuous space and walked briskly across the marble floor. He knew instantly that something was wrong. Terribly wrong. His heels clacked as he made his way into the "rec" room, clearly the room in which Paul and Zarah held their parties. It was a voluptuous space, replete with a screening room that included four-foot video displays and arcade games. The room smelled of leather. The vinyl couches had been sprayed with the odor and it continued to cling to the air like fall-out.

Tyler crossed the room and passed the bar. He noticed a glass of half-touched bourbon on the bar. Next to that he saw the

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vestiges of a line of cocaine. Poor Zarah, he thought. Still inhaling the rich man's aspirin.

Something on the mirror holding the line of coke caused Tyler to stop and move in closer. The razor blade used to cut and grind the expensive crystals into a fine powder was stained. Tyler shuddered. There was a drop of dark red blood on it.

He ran behind the bar, and then he saw her. Zarah was lying huddled in a heap, her long black hair crumpled in a hideous furry ball held tightly in her fist. It was her fall. Looking at her head, Tyler could make out the thinning gray hair of a very old woman. Poor Zarah. He knelt and lifted her head with his hand. He was extremely careful not to make any noise but his knees cracked as he went down. The sound of the snap echoed throughout the room.

Deftly, he inspected her neck. No pulse. She was dead. Then, her hand fell from within the bar and Tyler could see the streaks of red that wound their way down from her wrist to her fingers. Suicide? Tyler looked at the series of gashes along her left wrist. They were deep . . . too deep. It was a botched job. Zarah was left-handed. She would never have been able to cut herself so deeply with her less-used right hand. Raleigh. Tyler's mind raced with scenarios. Was he dead, too? Was he in the bathroom, hanging from the shower nozzle? Or was he responsible for murdering his beloved wife? What possible motive could he have? Tyler dismissed the idea immediately. Raleigh would have known his wife was left-handed. He wouldn't make such a mistake.

Suddenly, Tyler was surprised by the cold numbing sensation of a revolver's tip positioned at the base of his neck.

He turned around, feeling the gunhead follow his movements tightly. He looked up and was not surprised. It was the blond man in the ugly trench coat.

"She was a very unhappy woman," the blond said, in an accent thick with a southern drawl.

"She is now," Tyler responded, getting up. The blond pulled his gun closer to himself.

"No tricks, now, Mr. Jet-Set," he spat out. "Follow me."

He led Tyler to the bedroom. Tyler could see Raleigh spread out on the bedspread. They moved closer, and he could tell by the acute smile on Raleigh's face that he had been poisoned.

"Why did you have to kill them?" Tyler asked, his voice hushed

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in horror.

"Standard procedure," the man mumbled. "They'll both be written up as suicides. It's not uncommon among the very rich."

"Only a fool would believe that. But why *them*?" Tyler shot back, his horror now becoming fury.

"We needed something. Something that contained pertinent and confidential information."

"The cameo?"

"Yes. You noticed it was missing?"

"Of course. She told me."

"That's what I was afraid of."

Tyler was disturbed by the tone of his last remark. "You're not going to kill me, too, just because I know you needed some stupid brooch!" he commented.

"Later. First we have to get the cameo."

"What? But you just killed them! You *don't* have the cameo? Why did you kill them?"

"They were spies, Mr. Cliff. We were delighted to kill them, with or without the cameo." The man chuckled, exposing his gray teeth.

"Spies!" Tyler was incredulous. "I don't believe it!"

The man reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a wallet containing a badge and an I.D. The blond was from the CIA.

"Have you ever heard of FALN?" he inquired.

"I don't know what the letters stand for but they're the group that wants Puerto Rico to be independent of the United States," Tyler answered.

"Exactly."

"Now tell me what the Raleighs could possibly have to do with that, except that they were witnesses to this evening's attack!" Tyler shouted.

"Cool it, Jack. You seem to think you're so smart . . . well, you didn't know your friends that well. The Raleighs were agents of the FALN. She was trained as a terrorist during the second world war — there is some evidence that she was involved in the assassination attempt on Truman, but that was a long time ago. Her real name was Calienta Rojas. She bribed Raleigh into marrying her and then brainwashed him into working for her people. He wired top secret files through to Puerto Rico by way of stock figures sent electronically to his company headquarters in San

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Juan. Tonight's bombing of the Met was their little brainchild," he explained, without expressing any emotion.

"But why would they bother to show up?" Tyler wanted to know.

"The perfect alibi," the man answered. "Their seats were next to the exit. That's why I watched them so closely. We had word from a reliable source that they would be attending tonight's festivities, and that Zarah would be wearing a cameo that contained the latest top secret information she would pass along to her husband's contacts."

"But why tear gas the Met?" Tyler insisted.

"They knew they were being trailed. They needed to cause a disturbance to distract us. It worked. She managed to hide the cameo. I haven't been able to find it here."

"Sounds to me like you need to take a refresher course in espionage," Tyler remarked archly.

"Why don't you do your country a favor, Mr. Cliff, and give us the cameo?"

"What?" Tyler replied, shocked. "I don't have it!"

"Then explain to me why you raced back here after the explosion . . . except to deliver the missing item! Correct?" The man spoke in clipped tones, cocking his gun at Tyler.

"I told you I don't have it."

"Prove it."

"I refuse to answer any more of these scurrilous accusations. I want to call my lawyer."

"Strip!" the man ordered.

"How dare you!" Tyler cried back. "I can hire the best lawyer in the country — in the world! — and let you hang by the thinnest shred of evidence you have against me!" He laughed in the blond's face.

Then a voice broke through Tyler's laughter, a beautiful voice. It was Mariella Bravas.

"Your humor in the face of death, Tyler, is commendable."

Tyler spun around and saw the great diva standing at the door to the bedroom. She was wearing a long-flowing white evening gown. She held a revolver in her hand.

"Mariella," he gasped. "Your eyes . . . they're normal!"

"A ruse, my dear. Just a simple ruse. I thought it best to get out of that hell-hole as best I could without being interrogated by the

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police. Roger thought up the blind bit. He's such a creative publicist, don't you think?" she said, her brilliant smile brighter than the moon.

"What are you doing here?" the CIA agent cried out.

"Wouldn't you like to know, you idiot," she barked back. "You've screwed up ever since you started. Why don't you go back to Washington and arrest congressmen, or something."

She took his gun. "Get out of the way," Mariella snapped. He moved to the side and promptly shut up.

"How do you fit into this little thriller?" Tyler asked her.

"I fit in perfectly, darling. I'm a Red Spy."

"I don't believe it."

"Oh believe it, Ty. Not all opera lovers are republicans."

"But what do the communists have to do with FALN?"

"A free Puerto Rico would be very good news for Fidel, don't you think?"

"You'll never succeed!" the CIA man interrupted, his face as red as a stop sign.

"Shut up!" Mariella replied, pointing her gun at him and pulling the trigger. The blond fell to his knees and cried out in considerable pain. He'd survive.

"Anyway, as I was saying," Mariella continued, "Roger had arranged for a private ambulance to take me home for a quick shower, a change of clothes, and a short trip here to pick up the cameo. I never expected you'd be here. Although I'm not surprised; you have a knack for uncovering dirt."

"It was because of the cameo," Tyler replied cautiously. "I was heading home, thinking about the missing brooch, when I remembered where I'd first seen it. It was such an unusual cameo it was hard to forget. I remembered it had been yours when we were both at Yale. You told me that your father had given it to you before he died and you left Argentina."

"I've always enjoyed lying," she interrupted, smiling at him.

"Well, I can be taken for a ride sometimes. Especially when the liar is so exotic a beauty."

"Thank you, Tyler."

"So, anyway, when I remembered the cameo, I got to thinking. Why would Zarah be wearing your cameo? Unless . . . unless Raleigh gave it to her. It crossed my mind that maybe you had sold it to him because you were broke. I hurried over here to see

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if that was the case. I was going to lend you some money."

"That's very kind of you, dear, but you were wrong, weren't you?"

"I sure was."

"I'm sorry you had to get mixed up in this whole thing. It would have been better for you if you'd remained ignorant. Now I have to think about what I can do with you . . . "

"But what about the cameo?"

"Dammit, I keep forgetting. Where do you think it is?"

"It was stolen." Suddenly, as if inspired by his imminent death, Tyler's mind reached a pinnacle of clarity. He saw the whole scene. Zarah being kicked in the shins by the old woman in a mink coat that was decades out of style. The old woman grabbing the brooch as Zarah fell on top of her; then Tyler carrying her out the door, the woman clutching the cameo in her fist, fearful of anyone catching her. She wasn't a spy, the old biddy. She was just a thief. Tyler could not restrain the burst of laughter that exploded from his body. How perfectly ridiculous, he realized.

"What is so funny!" Mariella demanded.

"The cameo! Some old woman stole it. You'll never get it back now unless you attend every bridge party in Manhattan."

"I'm in stitches," Mariella replied, sarcastically.

She pulled the gun back and was about to squeeze her finger on the trigger when Tyler sprang forward, pressing the full weight of his head against her gut, sending her sprawling against the wall. The gun went off, shattering the mirror across the room. Both Mariella and Tyler stopped to look at their reflections in the shards. Then Tyler pulled both of her arms together and tied them behind her back with the belt sash of her dress.

"Damn you, Tyler! Don't turn me over to the police. I'll give you anything . . . I'll . . . "

"Mariella, one of the advantages to being a multi-millionaire is that no one can bargain with you. You should know better than that."

"I don't want to spend the rest of my life behind bars! I hate institutional food!

"Tyler!"

"It's your life, honey!" Tyler snapped back. With that, he reached for the phone. He looked over at his old friend, Mariella Bravas. She would look splendid in stripes. +

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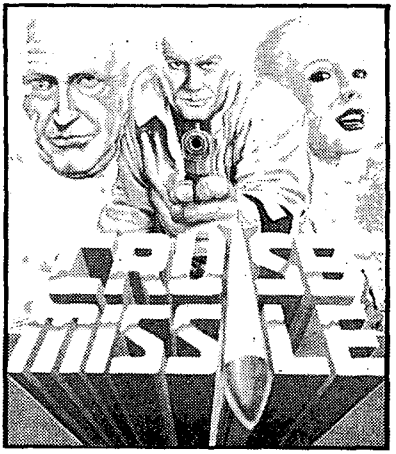

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YOU CAN'T FOOL A WIFE

by Ardath Mayhar

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Illustration by Robert Spike

To the Gentlemen who manage
the Kremlin / the KGB,
whichever is appropriate:

Dear Sirs:

Although you may know my name, for reasons to be covered somewhat later in this letter, I feel certain that you have never expected to hear directly from me. Knowing how men operate, that doesn't surprise me at all. But I am (was?) the wife of Conrad Disston, the Conradin Petroleum representative who recently made a trip to Moscow for discussions of drilling equipment with some of your petroleum people. Besides being a partner in that business, Conrad was an adviser to the U.S. government, which I am certain that you know (and knew). I can see your eyes squinting up, trying to figure out how I know that the man who came back to Texas and to me isn't the same Conrad Disston who started out. Only a man would have to wonder.

Did you really think that the way a person looks, talks, and walks is all there is to him? Short-sighted! Somehow, with all the experience I'm told that you people have in spying, I'd have expected more of you.

Of course this person is the same size, build, coloring, etc., as my husband was. But didn't it occur to you that a wife, more than anyone else in the world, has occasion not only to see and hear but also to smell and taste her husband? It didn't? What kind of marriages do they have over there, anyway? This character is a lot saltier than

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Conrad ever was.

He memorized our friends and business associates pretty well, I must admit, and you even thought to question Conrad (under sodium pentothal? I'm curious) about the techniques with which he makes love. But you must be a humorless bunch. He doesn't know any of our private jokes or have any notion of the silly way we carry on in bed. That's sloppy work. Very sloppy work.

Conrad is either dead, in which case I can't help him any, or he's being held secretly, and that seems to be the same situation. If I went to our government with this, they'd shake their heads and think, "Silly woman!" and call (not-) Conrad to come get me and take me to a shrink. I know them. They're men too.

But I also know Conrad (knew him?), and I understand exactly what he'd want me to do about this. Conrad loved money almost as much as he loved me and the business. He'd want me to make a killing (bad choice of words, there) off of it. Which I intend to do.

Now, don't think that you can kill me or shoot me full of drugs or anything like that, and keep your man in place over here. I've sent hair brushings, skin fragments, all kinds of personal stuff from your representative off to the company lab and had them analyzed, using a convenient (stupid) go-between. The bits and pieces of Conrad left around the house and in his things were also collected and analyzed. The two do not match. Those results are in a safe place, where they will come to light at once if any-

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thing at all happens to me, along with a copy of this letter — by the time this gets to you. Getting at me will jeopardize whatever it is that you intend for this fellow to do.

Don't worry about this letter, either. You will note that it is postmarked Moscow. I have a lot of friends who travel a great deal, and some of them are pretty remote chance acquaintances. Don't think you'll get anyplace trying to find out which tourist (not necessarily American) in Russia carried this over for me.

"What is she getting at?" I can feel you wondering it, all the way across the landmasses and the oceans between us. Money, of course. What else? I told you Conrad loves money, and we were much alike in that. Though there is a lot of stock, much property, all kinds of stuff, your man is now in control of most of it. I'd have to divorce him in order to get half, according to Texas law, and I'm sure you wouldn't like that kind of attention drawn to old Fred, or whatever his name is.

I want from you (I hope you're sitting down) a million dollars, to be deposited in a Swiss bank account, whose number is attached in the sealed envelope herewith. And hereafter, every year, a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, every December 25th. I thought that was appropriate — Conrad was sentimental about Christmas. In addition (don't flinch — this won't cost you anything), you can send word to Fred that I have a permanent headache. He doesn't turn me on, and he has bad breath. Also, his big toes are longer than the rest, and Conrad's were exactly

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even. That bothers me more than almost anything else.

All in all, I think that you need to put a woman in the KGB, or whatever. You missed too many important things. Nobody in the office or the government agencies will ever catch on that Fred isn't Conrad...that's obvious, and you were right about that. But nobody can fool a wife about her husband. Nobody. A woman would keep reminding you of that, and maybe you'd pick unmarried men to duplicate from now on. That would not only help your aims along, but it would keep any other woman from being put in my predicament.

I loved Conrad. I could cheerfully scrag the lot of you, if that were possible. As it is, I can bleed you a bit. You'd better be glad that my folks raised me to act like a lady and not to be greedy, otherwise you'd really develop a hemorrhage in the wallet.

You may wonder how I can square letting Fred do whatever it is he is supposed to do to my country with my conscience...or do you believe in consciences? I've watched all this jockeying around for the past forty years, and believe me, I'm sick of all of you on both sides of the fence. I'm sure that somewhere over there there's somebody just like Fred, fooling the hell out of you. I just hope my people were bright enough to pick a bachelor.

Honestly, men!

Yours confidently,

Louise Sneed Disston

cc/filed in secure place

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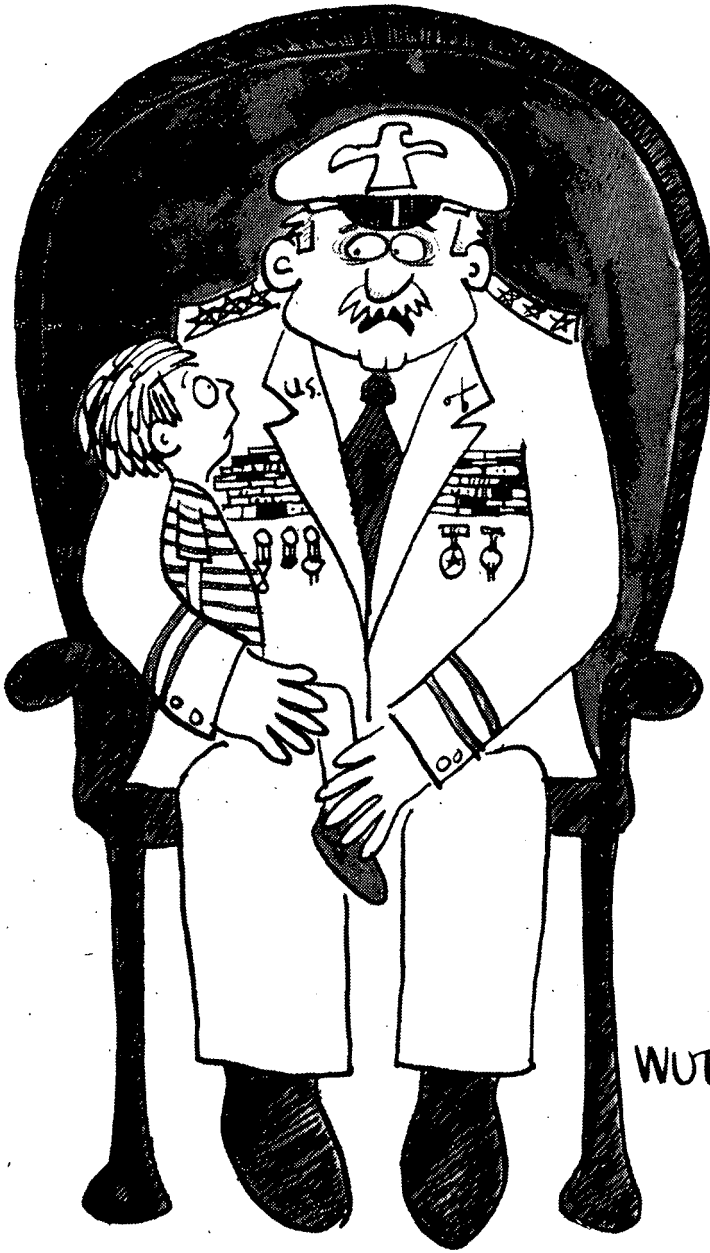

"Errr . . . You were shot out of a HOWITZER. Any more questions . . . ?"

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GAME

A cryptogram is a cipher, and a cipher is just a problem begging to be solved — all it takes is brain power, intuition, and a dogged determination to succeed. Since these characteristics pretty well describe ESPIONAGE readers, we thought we'd give you a little cipher to dwell on.

Although solving a cipher is its own reward, we're adding an incentive: The first three readers to submit the correct solution to this cipher will receive a free, one-year subscription to ESPIONAGE Magazine. Simply address your solutions to ESPIONAGE Magazine Cipher Contest, P.O. Box 1184, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

We can't tell you much about this cipher except, perhaps, that it can be solved with pencil and paper, some coffee and a clear eye. Good Luck!

Word transpositions are a time-honored method of communications security, though a little primitive in the computer age. To prove how perplexing they could be to the pencil and paper cryptanalysts of the past, here's one for you to try:

For an immediate copy of the solution to this puzzle send an SASE to: ESPIONAGE, EC-1, P.O. Box 1184, Teaneck, N.J. 07666. The solution will appear in the next issue of ESPIONAGE.

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CIPHER #1

AXQBD	AUSSE	FXRMP	TVDAY	HRSHW	MWOUY
XVNNY	FOMMK	WAOVF	HOIRY	VRTVM	NTNNH
AXQBF	KOINM	TVIUN	PWOMY	TFOUY	ADIUK
TFSMA	VOMNF	VCNVW	UNHMA	CWBTF	VEQNN
QAUOK	NQOUX	DAYAS	NWDVV	HFNEW	GWIBV
TFXAH	AAYUC	AAOMS	FMMPV	KFSNM	WIKAR
HAYTW	FLSEX	VOIMF	MABHM	BWTLQ	OPKUO
TOFDF	UDOAH	EUVUY	XIQNF	HESTY	AKSPE
BKQLE	XDNNS	LYNIW	KFTGW	XKXGS	KQIOT
KLTUK	HMFPW	WAENW	VCKVE	QBSLS	PAFHC
HIQTI	UDIVF	KUQFS	LDVOS	OKTCE	FGQRY
VRTMA	TBSFW	BFTUO	XIKAU	VIHOA	AXQLW
TISSA	KBQVV	BDQKW	BAMPA	AKTDS	HOSSS
LDTDF	DBQPD	FINPE	PWDAX	OACLU	VDABW
FKAEE	OAAAK	VFQLD	IIUUS	LDUMS	HGIUN
TBEFE	BUNNW	TLKAH	AXQBD	AUPOE	TFQCU
TFNTK	HWOVV	HLMVI	TGVGE	HABUL	VOTLE
BDUUF	DKAYS	KTABM	YDOVV	HOQBF	HIIUN
XKIMS	LDSTH	PWYOS	TRSSR	TGTGD	THWKT

of has with so impossible objectively say it in or in his until was history stripes cluttered virtually facts to first whether flown sea conflict receive stripes war the become tradition that to it who American was any land fact 1783 over the and myth is the impossible the or actually on the didn't and the stars and it state is designed flag ever battle during Washington stars after

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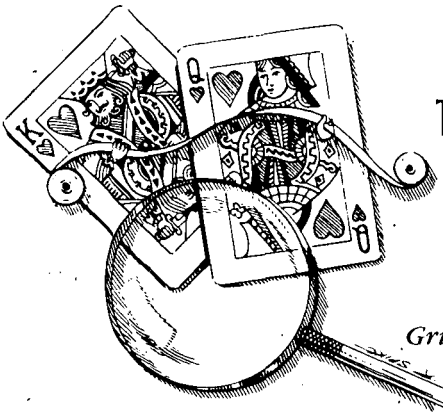

The Queen and King SOLUTION

Griswold's interpretation of the message follows:

"It says the Queen and King of Hearts," said Griswold, "and that's impossible. If it were Q, J, the Queen and Jack of Hearts, I would accept having the Q come first. I couldn't believe that anyone would put Queen ahead of King. That would be too anti-conventional."

"And then it occurred to me that 'Jack' is an old colloquialism for a servant. You have the King, the Queen, and a head servant at court, a seneschal, or something. Well, an older term for the card we call a Jack, is 'Knave,' which also means 'servant.' What if 'Q, K' does not stand for Queen and King of Hearts, but for Queen and Knave of Hearts."

"What if it does?" asked Baranof.

"The only reason," said Griswold, "we remember the older term is that it occurs in a nursery rhyme which retains its hold on us chiefly because it plays an important role in 'Alice in Wonderland.' You probably remember how it goes —

The Queen of Hearts
She made some tarts,
All on a summer's day;
The Knave of Hearts
He stole those tarts,
And with them ran away.

"Just substitute 'cookie' for 'tarts' and it tells the story quite clearly. Don't you think so?"

It did. What could we say? ⊣

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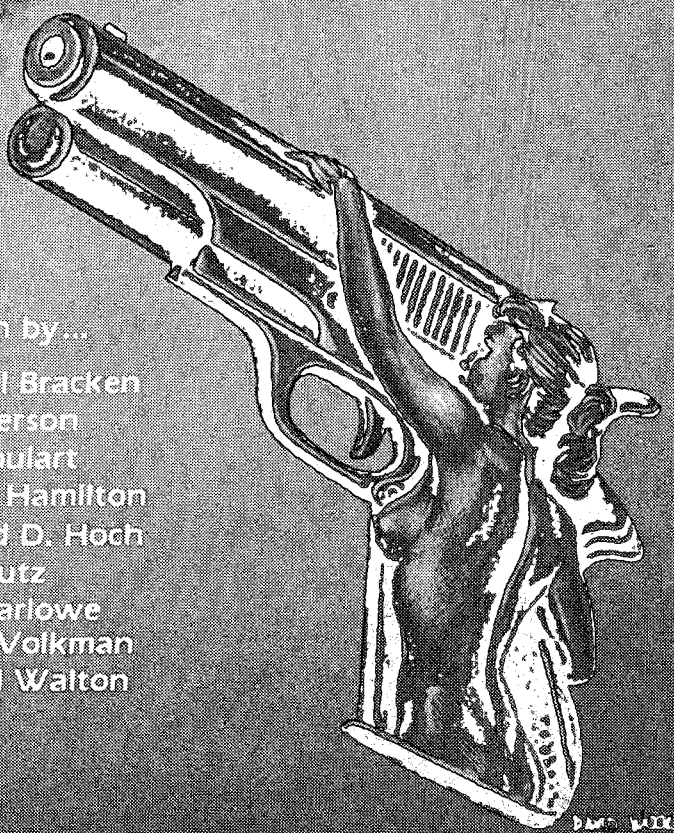
ESPIONAGE
MAGAZINE

Coming next issue...January/February 1985, on-sale December 13, 1984.



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General Irwin Rommel, "The Desert Fox," was known for his uncanny ability to thwart British plans and always hit the British at their weakest point. In his North Africa Campaign of 1941-42, his successes were legendary. It was as if he couldn't lose.

It is a little known fact, but Rommel had a reserved seat within British military headquarters.

Attached to British headquarters was the American military attache in Cairo, Colonel Bonner F. Fellers. Each evening, Fellers filed detailed and accurate reports to Washington, as was his job. Unfortunately, he radioed his messages in the *BLACK code,* which, unbeknown to the Allies, the Germans had already broken. Each night, therefore, German antennae welcomed his thorough battle status reports.

Within hours, Rommel was reading the briefings of the British 8th Army. Whatever Fellers reported, Rommel acted on — trapping commando teams, sinking British ships, and in seventeen days, throwing the British back 300 miles.

Finally, as part of an allied security leak search, President Roosevelt had Fellers' security measures investigated and recalled him to Washington. Rommel lost his seat around the 8th Army conference table, and the British started rolling the Afrika Korps back to Tunis.

Steganography is the art of concealing messages. It includes the science of secret inks, used to conceal information and orders in times of war, but used equally effectively to conceal, shall we say, "ill-conceived affairs of the heart."

In his poem, "The Art of Love," Ovid advised "A Letter is also safe and escapes the eye when written in new milk; touch it with coal dust and you will read. That too will deceive which is written with a stalk of moistened flax, and a pure sheet will bear hidden marks."

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